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of the Works of

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

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Honoré de Balzac

THE HOUSEHOLD EDITION

"*He was more than moral . . . he was religious.*"—Rev. Dr. A. H. Tuttle.

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LES CONTES DROLATIQUES

COLLECTED IN THE ABBEYS OF TOURAINE AND BROUGHT FORTH INTO THE LIGHT

THE FAIR IMPERIA

Le Sieur de Matjar

He stood dumfounded, like a robber before the officers of the law. The lady sans scruples shirt or head-dress. The maids and tire-women, busily removing her clothes and her shoes, bared her lovely body with such dexterity and openness, that the wonder-struck priest uttered an Ah! that smacked of love.

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VOLUME I

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LES CONTES DROLATIQUES

COLLECTED IN THE ABBEYS OF
TOURAINE AND BROUGHT FORTH INTO THE LIGHT

BY

Le Sieur de Balzac

FOR THE DIVERSION OF PANTAGRUELISTS AND OF
NONE OTHERS

TRANSLATED BY

GEORGE JOHN MURDOCH

ILLUSTRATED

AFTER PAINTINGS BY JACQUES WAGREZ

VOLUME I

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CONTES DROLATIQUES

THE FIRST TEN

PROLOGUE

This is a highly-seasoned book, full of diverting morsels of goodly savor, spiced to suit the taste of those most illustrious victims of the gout and those most accomplished topers, to whom our worthy compatriot, François Rabelais, the eternal glory of Touraine, formerly addressed himself. Not that the author has the presumption to wish to be aught else than a loyal Tourainer and to furnish entertainment for the bounteous repasts of the famous folk of that sweet and fertile country which produces more cuckolds, fools, and jesters than any other, and which has furnished its full share of the famous men of France, as the late Courier, of spicy memory; Verville, author of the *Moyen de Parvenir*, and others well known, of whom we may mention Sieur Descartes, for that he was a melancholy genius, who sang the praises of vain visions rather than wine and good cheer; a man whom all the pastry-cooks and innkeepers of Tours hold in pious horror, misunderstand him and refuse to listen to him; "Where does he live?" they say, if you mention his name.— This work, then, is the issue of the joyous leisure of divers good old monks, of whom there are many traces scattered through our province, as at La

Grenadière-les-Saint-Cyr, at the hamlet of Sacché-les-Azay-le-Ridel, at Marmoustiers, Veretz, La Roche-Corbon, and in some collections of pleasant anecdotes; who are monks of the old school and valiant women who lived in the good old times when honest folk could crack a joke without looking to see if a horse or a sportive colt or two issued from their sides with every laugh, like the young women of to-day, who choose to divert themselves in serious fashion: a custom as becoming to our merry France as an oil-cruet on a queen's head. And so, as laughter is a privilege granted to man alone, and as there is sufficient cause for tears on behalf of public liberty without adding thereto by books, I esteem it a deuced patriotic thing to publish a dram of merry conceits in these days when *ennui* falls like fine rain which drenches us, soaks us through at last, and goes on dissolving our ancient customs, which made the *raye publique* a source of amusement to the greatest number. Now there are very few left—and they are dying off every day—of those old Pantagruelists, who allowed God and the King their master to do their will, nor did they put their fingers in the pie more than they ought, being content with hearty laughter; so that I greatly fear to see these memorable fragments of olden breviaries cast out, spat upon, gagged, reproved, confounded—the which would seem to me no cause for mockery, insomuch as I continue to look with much respect upon the relics of our Gallic antiquities.

And do you remember, also, fierce critics, gleaners

of phrases, harpies who pervert the ideas and purposes of everyone, that we laugh only when we are children; and, as we journey on, laughter evaporates, vanishes like unto the oil in a lamp. This means that one must be innocent and pure of heart to laugh; for lack of which you twist your lips, work your cheeks, and scowl like people who hide vices and impurity. Take this book, therefore, as a group or a statue from which an artist cannot expunge certain features, and would be a twenty-two carat idiot if he should so much as put fig-leaves over them, because such works are not made for convents, any more than this book. Nevertheless, I have taken pains, to my great regret, to weed out from the manuscripts all the old words—still a little too young—which might have offended the ears, dazzled the eyes, reddened the cheeks, puckered the lips of virgins in breeches, and virtue with three lovers; for one must needs do something for the vices of one's time, and periphrasis is much more gallant than plain-speaking! In truth, we are growing old and we esteem long-winded trifles more highly than the brief escapades of our youth, because we can enjoy them longer. Spare me, therefore, in your evil-speaking, and read this rather by night than by day; and give it not to the maidens, if there be any such, lest the book take fire. I take myself off. But I fear nothing for this book, because it is derived from an exalted and precious source, whence everything that has come forth has enjoyed great success: witness the royal orders of the Golden

Fleece, the Holy Ghost, the Garter, and the Bath, and many other notable things which were taken therefrom, in whose shadow do I take my stand.

"Now, my loves, make merry, and gayly read every word with your body and loins at ease, and may ulcers consume you if you deny me after reading me!"—These are the words of our dear master Rabelais, to whom we should doff our caps in token of reverence and honor, as the prince of all wisdom and all merriment.

THE FAIR IMPERIA

The Archbishop of Bordeaux had taken in his train, when he set forth to attend the Council of Constance, a sweet little priest of Touraine, whose manners and speech were curiously winning, insomuch that he was deemed to be the son of La Soldée and the governor. The Archbishop of Tours had readily lent him to his confrère on his passage through that city, for archbishops are wont to exchange gifts of this sort, knowing how intense is the theological itching. And so this young priest came to the Council and was lodged in the house of his prelate, who was a man of estimable morals and great learning.

Philippe de Mala—such was the priest's name—resolved to bear himself becomingly and to serve his patron faithfully; but he saw in that mysterious council of priests many men leading dissolute lives, yet gaining rather more than less indulgences, gold pieces, and benefices than all those of more virtuous and orderly lives. Now, on a certain night, when his virtue was sore bestead, the devil whispered in his ear and understanding that he must lay in his provisions by the basketful, since everyone might suckle at the bosom of our holy mother Church, yet would

it not run dry; a miracle which proved the presence of God. And the Touraine priest did not neglect the devil's advice. He promised himself to feast and to riot in roast meats and other German sauces whenever he could do it without paying, seeing that he was as poor as a man can be. As he continued to be very continent, for he took pattern by his poor old archbishop, who perforce sinned no more and was esteemed a saint, he had often to suffer intolerable cravings followed by fits of melancholy, because of the great numbers of beautiful courtesans, gayly bedecked, but cold as ice to the poor, who were sojourning at Constance to enlighten the understandings of the fathers of the Council. He was distracted because he knew not how to come nigh those chattering lights-o'-love, who rebuffed cardinals, commendatory abbés, auditors of the Rota, legates, bishops, princes, dukes, and margraves, as if they had been simple clerks, with empty pockets. In the evening, having said his prayers, he practised speaking to them, learning by heart the sweet breviary of love. He put questions to himself, that he might be prepared to make answer in any contingency. And on the morrow, if, at the hour of complines, he chanced to meet one of the aforsesaid princesses, in fine array, perched in her litter, escorted by pages well-armed, and proud as a popinjay, he would stand open-mouthed, like a dog catching flies, at sight of those sprightly features, which caused him to burn so fiercely.

Monseigneur's secretary, a gentleman of Périgord,

having clearly demonstrated to him that the fathers, procurators, and auditors of the Rota purchased by lavish gifts—not relics or indulgences, but gold and jewels—the favor of intimacy with the haughtiest of those petted pusses who abode under the protection of the lords of the Council, the poor Tourainer, simple and chaste as he was, hoarded in his mattress the gold angels given him by the good archbishop for his labors as a scribe, and hoped some day to have enough of them to be able to get a peep at some cardinal's light-o'-love, trusting to God for the rest. He was without a hair from head to heels, and resembled a man no more than a goat in a nightcap resembles a maid; but, spurred on by his desire, he would go out at night and wander through the streets of Constance, caring little for his life; and at the risk of being run through the body by soldiers, he watched the cardinals entering their mistresses' houses. Then would he see the wax-candles lighted in the houses, and the doors and windows suddenly gleaming bright. Then would he hear the sanctified abbés and others capering about, drinking the best, inflamed with love, singing the secret alleluia, and giving largess to the music with which they were regaled. The kitchens performed miracles, and many a Prayer they said of rich and succulent stews, followed by Matins of young hams, Vespers of dainty tidbits, and Lauds of sweetmeats. And after drinking, silence fell upon the worthy churchmen. Their pages diced on the stairs, and the restive mules stamped in the street.

All went well! But faith and religion were there, I ween! That is how it came to pass that goodman Huss was burned! And the cause? He put his hand in the dish without being asked. Moreover, why must he be a Huguenot before other people?

To return to dear little Philippe, many a time he was roughly handled, and many a lusty blow he received; but the devil encouraged him, urging him to believe that, sooner or later, would come his turn to play the cardinal with the mistress of one. His longing made him bold as a stag in autumn; and so it came about that he stole one evening into the finest house in Constance, where he had often seen chamberlains, seneschals, varlets, and pages waiting with torches for their masters,—kings, dukes, cardinals, and archbishops.

"Aha!" he said to himself, "she who dwells here must be a lovely and a wanton creature."

An armed retainer suffered him to pass, thinking that he belonged to the Elector of Bavaria, who had just taken his leave, and that he was the bearer of a message from that lord. Philippe de Mala ascended the stairs as swiftly as a greyhound goaded by amorous frenzy, and a delectable perfume guided him to the chamber where the mistress of the house sat chatting with her women, putting off her garments the while. He stood dumbfounded, like a robber before the officers of the law. The lady was without skirt or head-dress. The maids and tire-women, busily removing her clothes and her shoes, bared her lovely body with such dexterity

and openness, that the wonderstruck priest uttered an *Ah!* that smacked of love.

"Pray, what do you wish, my little fellow?" said the lady.

"To lay my heart at your feet," he replied, devouring her with his eyes.

"You may return to-morrow," she rejoined, to make merry at his cost.

To which, Philippe, flushing crimson, prettily made answer:

"I will not fail."

She laughed like a mad woman. Philippe, abashed and breathless, but happy withal, fixed upon her two eyes which feasted upon fascinating treasures of love: as beautiful hair falling over a back of ivory whiteness and disclosing luscious bits of flesh, white and gleaming, through its innumerable curling locks. She wore upon her snow-white brow a balas ruby, less lavish of fiery rays than her black eyes which her hearty laughter had moistened with tears. She herself threw off her pointed shoe, gilded like a reliquary, writhing about for very wantonness, and showed her dainty foot, as tiny as a swan's bill. She was in merry mood that evening; else would she have ordered the little shaveling tossed out of the window, paying no more heed to him than to her first bishop.

"He hath fine eyes, madame," said one of the tire-women.

"Whence came he, pray?" queried another.

"Poor child!" cried madame, "his mother will

be looking for him. We must show him the way home."

The Tourainer, retaining his self-possession, made a gesture of delight as he gazed upon the gold brocade-covered bed, whereon the damsel's lovely body was soon to rest. That glance, overflowing with life and with amorous intelligence, amused the lady's caprice, who, half laughing, half vexed with the darling, repeated: "To-morrow!" and dismissed him with a gesture which Pope John himself would have obeyed, especially as he was like a snail without its shell, the Council having unpoped him.

"Ah! madame, another vow of chastity changed to amorous desire," said one of the women.

And the laughter broke forth anew, as merry as hail. Philippe withdrew, knocking his head against the walls like a genuine hooded crow, all dazzled as he was by having seen that creature, a more delicious morsel than a siren rising from the waves. He noticed the figures of animals carved above the door, and returned to his excellent archbishop with a thousand baskets of devils in his heart and a store of cunning in his entrails. He went up to his tiny chamber and counted his angels all night long, but could make no more than four; and as that was his all, he opined that he could content the fair lady by giving her all he had in the world.

"What is the matter, pray, Philippe?" said the good archbishop, disturbed by the tremblings and *Oh! ohs!* of his clerk.

"Ah! monseigneur!" the poor priest replied, "I

am wondering how so light and sweet a woman can weigh so heavily on the heart!"

"What woman?" queried the archbishop, laying aside his breviary, wherein he was reading for the behoof of others, worthy man!

"Ah! Jesus! you will rebuke me, my dear master and patron, for that I have seen the mistress of a cardinal at the very least. And I weep because I lack many more than one wretched crown to give her, even though you should permit me to convert her to the right way."

The archbishop contracted the circumflex accent above his nose, but said not a word. Whereupon the humble priest did tremble in his skin for that he had confessed to his superior. But the holy man abruptly said to him:

"Of a truth, is she so very dear?"

"Ah!" was the reply, "she hath stripped many a mitre and spoiled many a crozier."

"Even so, Philippe, an thou wilt renounce her, I will lend thee thirty gold angels from the poor-box."

"Ah! monseigneur, I should lose too much!" rejoined the youth, aflame with the thought of the feast to which he looked forward.

"Oh! Philippe," said the good Bordelais, "wilt thou go to the devil and displease God, like all our cardinals?"

And the master, overwhelmed with grief, began to pray to Saint Gatien, patron saint of chaste youths, to save his servitor. He made him kneel and bade him commend himself to Saint Philippe; but the

wretched priest under his breath besought the saint to help him not to faint if on the morrow his lady should have mercy and compassion for him; and the good archbishop, observing his servant's fervor, exclaimed:

"Courage, boy! Heaven will grant thy prayer."

On the morrow, while monseigneur declaimed at the Council against the licentious conduct of the apostles of Christianity, Philippe de Mala squandered his hard-earned angels in perfumery, baths, vapor-baths, and other trifles. In sooth, so foppish did he make himself that you would have said he was some lovelorn damozel's darling. He wandered through the town until he recognized the abode of his heart's queen; and when he asked the passers-by whose house it was, they laughed in his face, saying:

"Whence comes this scurvy knave who has not heard of the fair Imperia?"

He was sore afraid lest he had spent his angels for the devil's behoof, when he knew, from the name, into what a terrible trap he had walked of his own will.

Imperia was the most finical and capricious creature in the world; moreover, she was esteemed the most gloriously beautiful, and the most skilful in beguiling cardinals and cajoling rough soldiers and oppressors of the people. She had her own gallant captains, archers, and noblemen, eager to serve her in every way. She had but to lisp a word to compass the death of those who presumed to weary her.

The undoing of a man cost her only a pretty smile; and often the Sire de Baudricourt, one of the captains in the service of the King of France, would ask her if there were anyone he could kill for her that day, by way of jest when there were churchmen present. Saving the potentates among the higher clergy, with whom Madame Imperia shrewdly held her merriment in check, she led everyone by the nose, by virtue of her nimble tongue and her fashion of loving, whereby the most virtuous and coldest were caught fast as by bird-lime. So she was as dearly loved and as respected as the real great ladies and princesses, and was called Madame.—Wherefore the good Emperor Sigismond thus replied to a prudish dame who spoke slightingly of her: "Let virtuous women cling to the estimable customs of blessed virtue, and Madame Imperia to the charming transgressions of the goddess Venus."—Christian words whereat the ladies most wrongfully took offence.

Philippe, therefore, thinking of the delectable feast his eyes had had overnight, suspected that there would be nothing more for him. Whereat he grieved; and, neither eating nor drinking, wandered through the town, awaiting the hour; and he was so gallant and coquettish that other charmers would have been less inaccessible than was Madame Imperia.

When night came, the comely little Tourainer, puffed out with pride, caparisoned with desires, and impelled by the *Alack-a-days* which suffocated him, glided like an eel to the abode of the real queen of the Council; for to her all the authority, learning,

and virtue of Christendom bent the knee. The maître d'hôtel knew him not and would have cast him out, but the tire-woman called from the stair-top:

"Hola, Messire Imbert, 'tis madame's little one!"

And poor Philippe, red as a wedding-night, mounted the spiral stair, stumbling with joy in his good-fortune. The maid took him by the hand and led him to the room where madame was in state, already painted for the fray, gallantly arrayed like a brave woman who hopes for the best. The resplendent Imperia sat at a table covered with a velvety cloth worked in gold, and with all the paraphernalia of a joyous carouse. Flagons of wine, thirsty goblets, bottles of hippocras, stone jars full of good Cyprus, dishes filled with sweetmeats, roasted peacocks, green sauces, little salted hams, would have gladdened the gallant's eyes, had he loved Madame Imperia less. She saw plainly that her little monk had eyes for her alone. Albeit well used to the dazzling devotion of churchmen, she was well pleased, inasmuch as she had fallen in love the night before with the poor boy, who had played havoc in her heart all day. The shutters had been closed. Madame was kindly disposed and apparelled as if to do honor to a prince of the Empire. And so the rascal, beatified by Imperia's sacrosanct beauty, knew full well that neither Emperor, burgrave, nay, not even a cardinal about to be chosen Pope, would prevail that evening against him, humble priest that he was, who, in his poor lodging, sheltered only the devil

and love. He assumed a lordly air and strut as he saluted her with a courtesy in nowise ridiculous; and thereupon the lady said to him, making him welcome with a burning glance:

"Sit beside me, that I may see if you are changed since yesterday."

"Oh, yes!" he rejoined.

"How so?" queried she.

"Yesterday," replied slyboots, "I loved you. To-night we love each other; and I, who was then a poor, unhappy wretch, have become richer than a king."

"Oh! boy! boy!" she cried in high glee, "thou art changed, indeed, for thou wert a young monk, and well I see that thou hast become an old devil."

And they sat themselves down cheek by jowl before a blazing fire, which scattered their bliss in all directions. Nor did they advance beyond the point of being ready to eat, because they thought only of billing and cooing with their eyes, nor touched the dishes. As they were at last installed in comfort and contentment, there arose a hateful clamor at madame's door, as if people were fighting and shouting there.

"Madame," said the tire-woman, hastily entering, "there is another—"

"Who?" she cried, haughtily as a tyrant, angered at the interruption.

"The Bishop of Coire would speak with you—"

"May the devil curry him!" she retorted, with a melting glance at Philippe.

"He saw the light through the crack, madame, and is making a great outcry."

"Say to him that I have the fever, and you will not say false, for I am ill with this little monk, who is fluttering about in my brain."

But, as she finished speaking, and devoutly pressed Philippe's hand, whose blood was boiling beneath his skin, the stout Bishop of Coire appeared, all breathless and wrathful. His lackeys followed, bearing upon a golden plate a trout of the canonical salmon hue, freshly taken from the Rhine; spices, too, in marvellous dishes, and delicacies of all sorts, as liqueurs and preserves made by the holy nuns in his abbeys.

"Ah! ah!" he exclaimed in his hoarse voice, "I have my appointed time to spend with the devil, and you need not cause me to be flayed by him beforehand, my love."

"Your belly will make a fine scabbard for a sword some day!" she retorted, knitting her brows, which, but now lovely and engaging, became fierce enough to make one quake.

"And this choir-boy, comes he to the offertory thus early?" queried the bishop, insolently turning his broad, florid face toward the comely Philippe.

"Monseigneur, I am here to confess madame."

"Oho! dost thou not know the canons? To confess ladies at this hour of the night is a function reserved for bishops. Now, begone, go and feed with simple monks, and return here no more on pain of excommunication."

"Do not stir!" roared Imperia, more lovely with anger than she had been with love, for now there were both love and anger in her beauty. "Stay, my friend, you are at home here!"

Thereupon, he knew that she really loved him.

"Is it not set down in the breviary and taught by the Church that you shall be equal before God in the valley of Jehosaphat?" she asked the bishop.

"That is an invention of the devil, who has changed the text of the Bible; but it is written," replied the great clown of a bishop, in haste to sit at table.

"Even so; therefore be ye equal before me, who am your goddess here on earth," retorted Imperia; "else will I cause you to be strangled delicately some day between your head and your shoulders! I swear it by the omnipotence of my tonsure, which is worth no less than the Pope's!"

And, desiring that the trout, likewise the gold plate, the sweetmeats and their receptacles, should grace the board, she added craftily:

"Be seated and drink."

But the sly minx, who had been in such deviltry before, winked at her lover to signify that he need have no anxiety concerning the German, for the wine would soon deal with him.

The maid seated the bishop at the table and served him assiduously, while Philippe, aflame with a passion which closed his mouth, in that he saw his good-fortune vanishing in smoke, consigned the bishop to more devils than there were living monks.

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They had reached the middle of the feast, which the young monk had not yet touched, being hungry for naught but Imperia, beside whom he sat crouching in his chair, saying not a word, yet speaking that soft language which women understand without periods, commas, accents, letters, figures, characters, notes, or metaphors. The corpulent bishop, who was of a sensual temperament and careful of the ecclesiastical integument wherein his deceased mother had sewn him, allowed himself to be generously supplied with hippocras by madame's delicate hand, and had already reached his first hiccough, when there was a great stamping of horses and commotion in the street. The number of horses and the shouts of *Ho! ho!* from the pages denoted the arrival of some prince wild with love. And in truth, a moment later the Cardinal of Ragusa, to whom Imperia's servants dared not close the door, entered the room. At that depressing sight, the poor courtesan and her favorite were as humiliated and disconcerted as lepers of yesterday, for to attempt to eject the cardinal was to defy the devil, the more as no one knew at that time who would be Pope, the three claimants having resigned their caps for the good of christendom. The cardinal, a crafty Italian with a heavy beard, a great casuist, and the master-spirit of the Council, divined, by the faintest exertion of his wit, the alpha and omega of this adventure. He had to reflect but a moment to determine how he must proceed to obtain good security for his embraces. He had come thither under the

spur of a monk's appetite, and, to satisfy that appetite, he was quite capable of stabbing two monks and selling his bit of the true cross, which would have been a grievous thing.

"Ho, friend!" he said to Philippe, calling him to his side.

The poor Tourainer, more dead than alive, suspecting that the devil was taking a hand in his affairs, rose, and said to the redoubtable cardinal:

"Your Eminence?"

The cardinal, taking him by the arm and leading him to the stairs, looked into the whites of his eyes and rejoined without dallying:

"*Ventredieu!* thou art a fine little fellow, and I should grieve to be obliged to give thy head to know how much thy belly weighs!—My gratification might cost me some pious foundations in my old age. So, choose; wilt thou marry an abbey for the rest of thy life, or marry madame to-night, to die to-morrow?"

The poor Tourainer, in desperation, replied:

"And when your ardor has passed, monseigneur, may I return?"

The cardinal found it hard to be angry; however, he said sternly:

"Choose! a tall tree or a mitre?"

"Ah!" said the monk slyly, "a good rich abbey."

With that the cardinal returned to the dining-hall, took a writing-case, and scrawled upon a bit of parchment a note for the French envoy.

"Monseigneur," said the Tourainer while the prelate was spelling out the name of the abbey, "the

Bishop of Coire will not go so readily as I; for he has as many abbeys as the soldiers have drinking-places in the town; moreover, he is in the joy of the Lord! In my opinion, I owe you a useful warning in return for this most desirable abbey.—You know how malignant this accursed chin-cough is, which has been such a cruel scourge in Paris, and how rapidly it spreads. Say to him that you have but now been in attendance on your beloved old friend the Archbishop of Bordeaux. By that means you will cause him to fly like fire before a high wind."

"Ha! ha!" cried the cardinal, "you deserve something better than an abbey. *Ventredieu!* my young friend, here are a hundred golden crowns for your journey to the Abbey of Turpenay, which I won at play yesterday, and which I give you unconditionally."

When she heard these words and saw Philippe de Mala depart without the titillating glance overflowing with the quintessence of love which she hoped to receive from him, the leonine Imperia, puffing like a dolphin, divined the monk's dastardly behavior. She was not yet a good Catholic enough to forgive her lover for flouting her, and for preferring not to die for her caprice. Wherefore Philippe's death was plainly written in the viperish glance she shot at him to insult him; whereat the cardinal was well pleased, for the lecherous Italian saw that he should recover his abbey ere long. The Tourainer, heedless and without fear of the coming storm, stole away, silent and chapfallen, like a wet dog driven

from a church. Madame heaved a heartfelt sigh! She would have trounced all mankind soundly, had all mankind been in her clutches, for the fire which possessed her mounted to her head, and flames crackled in the air about her. There was good reason, for it was the first time that a priest had flouted her.—Now, the cardinal smiled, believing that his good-fortune and pleasure were to meet no further obstacle. Was he not a cunning fellow? therefore had he a red hat!

"Well! well! my dear gossip," he said to the bishop, "I congratulate myself on being in your company, and well pleased am I that I was able to dismiss that little varlet, who is unworthy of madame; especially, my lovely and gamesome fawn, because, if you had approached him, you might well have died a degrading death, all for a simple monk."

"Eh! how so?"

"He is scribe to Monseigneur the Archbishop of Bordeaux! Now, that excellent man was attacked this morning by the plague."

The bishop opened his mouth as if he were about to swallow a cheese.

"Eh! from whom do you know that?" he demanded.

"'Tis true!" said the cardinal, taking the worthy German's hand; "I have but now administered the sacrament and consolation. At this moment, the holy man has a fair wind for paradise."

The Bishop of Coire proved how light of foot stout men may be; for the big-bellied have, by the grace

of God, as a recompense for their trials, interior tubes as elastic as balloons. Now, the said bishop jumped back, sweating from his effort, and coughing already like an ox who finds feathers in his manger. Then, suddenly turning pale, he rushed down the stairs without so much as bidding madame adieu. When the door had closed on the bishop and he was flying through the street, Monsieur de Ragusa laughed long and loud and essayed to jest.

"Ah! sweetheart, do I not deserve to be Pope, and, better still, your lover to-night?"

But, seeing that Imperia was thoughtful, he approached her, to take her tenderly in his arms and coddle her after the manner of cardinals, who are more expert in such matters than other men, even than soldiers, in that they have little occupation, and do not waste the essence of their intellect.

"Aha!" she exclaimed, recoiling from him, "you wish my death—fool of an archbishop!—The essential thing in your eyes is to enjoy yourself, vile ruffian, and my pretty plight is a mere secondary matter. What if your pleasure causes my death? you will canonize me, will you not? Ah! you have the chin-cough, and you desire me! Turn about and seek elsewhere, brainless monk. And lay not a finger on me," she added as she saw him come forward, "else will I stab you with this dagger."

And the cunning wench took from her alms-chest a pretty little stiletto which she could handle with wonderful address on occasion.

"But, my little paradise, my pretty pet," laughed

the other, "dost thou not see the trick? Had I not to get rid of that old clown of Coire?"

"Oh! yes.—Now, I shall see if you love me," she rejoined. "I wish you to go instantly. If you have caught the disease, my death is of little moment to you. I know you well enough to know what price you would give for a moment's joy when you were dying. You would drown the earth in money. Ah! you boasted of it when you were in your cups. Now, I love only myself, my treasures, and my health.—Go, and if your entrails are not paralyzed by the *trousse-galant*, you may come again and see me to-morrow.—To-day, I hate you, my good cardinal," she said with a smile.

"Imperia!" cried the cardinal, on his knees, "my blessed Imperia, do not make sport of me!"

"No," she retorted, "I never make sport of holy and consecrated things."

"Ah! vile harlot, I will excommunicate thee—to-morrow!"

"God have mercy! now you have forgotten your cardinalship's common-sense."

"Imperia! satanic child of Satan! Hé la la! my beauty! my little darling!"

"You are losing your self-respect. Do not kneel! Fie! fie!"

"Wilt thou have a dispensation *in articulo mortis?* Wilt thou have my fortune, or, better still, a fragment of the real true Cross?—Say, wilt thou?"

"All the treasures of heaven and earth would not buy my heart to-night!" she rejoined with a laugh.

"I should be the vilest of sinners, unworthy to receive the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, had I not my whims."

"I will set fire to thy house! Sorceress, thou hast bewitched me! Thou shalt perish at the stake!—Listen to me, my love, my little wench, I promise thee the best place in heaven! Eh?—No?—Death! death to the witch!"

"Oho! I will kill you, monseigneur."

The cardinal foamed at the mouth in a frenzy of passion.

"You are going mad," she said; "go—this exhausts you."

"I shall be Pope and thou shalt pay me for this trouble."

"Then you will no longer have a pretext for not obeying me."

"What can I do, in God's name, to please thee to-night?"

"Go."

She ran to her bedroom, nimble as a wagtail, and bolted the door, leaving the cardinal to fume and rage, until at last he was fain to take himself off. When the fair Imperia found herself alone before the fire, seated at the table but without her little priest, she exclaimed, breaking all her little gold chains in her wrath:

"By the devil's double, triple horn, if the boy has caused me to put this trick upon the cardinal and run the risk of being poisoned to-morrow, and I am not to have my fill of him!—why, I will not die until I

have seen him burned alive before my eyes.—Ah!" she continued, weeping genuine tears, "I lead a most wretched life, and the little good-fortune which falls to my lot here and there I earn by plying a dog's trade, to say nothing of my salvation—"

As she finished her soliloquy, gurgling like a calf under the knife, she saw in her Venetian mirror the ruddy cheeks of the little priest, who had dexterously concealed himself, appear behind her.

"Ah!" she cried, "thou art the prettiest little monk that ever *monked* it in this blessed, amorous town of Constance! Oh! come, my pretty knight, my dearest boy, my plump fellow, my paradise of delight! I would drink of thine eyes, devour thee, kill thee with love! Oh! my blooming, my ever-green, immortal god!—I would make thee, my little monk, King, Emperor, Pope, and happier than them all!—Thou mayst put everything here to fire and the sword! For I am thine! aye, and will prove it, for thou shalt be cardinal and that right soon, though I be forced to shed all my heart's blood to dye thy beretta red."

And with her trembling hands, trembling with joy, she filled with Grecian wine a golden goblet brought by the stout Bishop of Coire, and proffered it to her companion, whom she would fain serve on her knees, she whose slipper princes found more to their taste than the Pope's!

But he gazed at her, in silence, with eyes so greedy of love, that she said, quivering with pleasure:

"Hush, boy! Let us sup."

THE VENIAL SIN

HOW GOODMAN BRUYN TOOK UNTO HIMSELF A WIFE

Messire Bruyn, he who completed the castle of La Roche-Corbon-les-Vouvray, on the Loire, was a roistering blade in his youth. Even as a mere stripling, he ruined young maids, sowed discord in families, and went straightway to the devil when he had put his father, the Baron de la Roche-Corbon, under the ground. Thereafter he could hold high carnival every day; and, in sooth, he toiled with both hands for his pleasure. Now, by dint of making his gold pieces sneeze and his breeches cough, bleeding the wine-casks, regaling harlots, and robbing Peter to pay Paul, he was ostracized by all worthy folk, nor had any friends save marauders and money-lenders. But the money-lenders soon became as rough as chestnut-burrs when he had no other security to give than his seignorial estate of Roche-Corbon, inasmuch as that estate—*Rupes Carbonis*—was holden of the king our sire. Thereupon was Bruyn much disposed to deal blows on all sides, to break other people's collar-bones, and to pick quarrels with everyone for trifles. Which seeing,

the Abbé de Marmoustiers, his neighbor, a worthy man, and free of speech, said to him that this was a potent sign of seignorial perfection, that he was walking in the straight path, but that, if he would go forth and, for the glory of God, confound the Mahometans who defiled the Holy Land, it would be even better, and that he would return without stain, full of riches and indulgences, to Touraine, or to Paradise, whence all barons originally came.

The said Bruyn, admiring the prelate's great wisdom, departed from the province, being thereto equipped by the monastery and blessed by the abbé, to the great joy of his neighbors and friends. Thereafter he put to the sword many cities of Asia and Africa, fell upon the miscreants without warning, slew Saracens, Greeks, English, or others, taking little heed if they were friends or whence they came, for among his good qualities was that of not being inquisitive: nor questioned them until he had killed them. At this trade, most agreeable to God, the king, and himself, Bruyn won renown as a good Christian and loyal knight, and was much diverted over-seas, for he would give a gold piece to the damsels more readily than six sous to a poor man, although he fell in with more comely poor men than spotless wenches; but, like a good Tourainer, nothing came amiss to him. Finally, when he had had his fill of Turks, relics, and other spoils of the Holy Land, Bruyn returned from the Crusade, to the vast amazement of the Vouvrillons, laden with gold and precious stones, more fortunate than others,

who were rich when they set forth, but returned heavy with leprosy and light of purse. On his return from Tunis, our good King Philippe made him a count and his seneschal in our province and in Poitou. Thereafter was he much beloved, and with good reason esteemed, for, besides all his excellent qualities, he founded the church of the Barefooted Carmelites in the parish of Esgrignolles, by way of atonement to Heaven for the follies of his youth. Wherefore he was enshrined in the good graces of God and the Church. The wayward youth and young man of evil life had become a good man, prudent and discreet in dissipation, as he had lost his hair. He rarely was angry, unless God's name was taken in vain before him, which he would not brook, for that he had taken His name in vain for all mankind, in his youth. Nor did he quarrel as before, because, being seneschal, everyone gave way to him incontinently. It should be said, moreover, that all his desires were gratified; the which makes even a devil's imp placid and calm from top to toe. And then, too, he possessed a castle, pinked on all the seams and slashed like a Spanish doublet, perched on a hill whence it was reflected in the Loire; in the great halls were royal tapestries, furniture, and trinkets, rare objects and Saracen inventions, whereat the good people marvelled, even the archbishop and clerks of Saint-Martin, upon whom he bestowed a banner fringed with fine gold. Around the aforesaid castle were many fine domains, mills, noble forests, with multitudes of

feudatory estates of all sorts, so that he was one of the most powerful feudal lords of the province, and could lead a thousand men to war for the king our sire. In his old age, if perchance his bailiff, a diligent man in hanging malefactors, brought before him a poor peasant suspected of some knavery, he would say with a smile: "Let the fellow go, Breddif; he will count against some of those whose hearts I broke unthinkingly over-sea." Often, too, he sternly gave orders that they be tied to an oak or hanged on his gibbets; but solely that justice might be done, and that the custom should not become extinct in his domains. Wherefore the people upon his lands were as virtuous and continent as nuns of yesterday, and lived in tranquillity because he protected them from highwaymen and bandits, whom he never spared, knowing by experience how great harm was done by those accursed beasts of prey. He was very devout, too, despatching everything promptly, religious services and good wine, and settled lawsuits in the Turkish fashion, said a thousand pleasant things to those who lost, and dined with them to console them. He caused those who were hanged to be laid in consecrated ground, as people belonging to God, considering that they had been sufficiently punished by being prevented from living. Nor did he persecute the Jews save when the time was ripe, and they swollen to bursting with usury and riches; he allowed them to hoard their plunder like honey-bees, saying that they were the best of tax-gatherers. And he never

despoiled them save for the benefit and behoof of churchmen, the king, or the province, or for his own service.

This debonair conduct won for him the esteem and affection of everyone, great and small. If he returned smiling from his chair of justice, the Abbé de Marmoustiers, who was as old as he, would say: "Aha! messire, so somebody has been hanged, that you laugh thus?"—And when he rode through Faubourg Saint-Symphorien on his way from La Roche-Corbon to Tours, the little girls would say:

"It's court-day, here comes Goodman Bruyn."

And they would stare fearlessly at him as he rode along on a tall white hackney he had brought from the Levant. The boys on the bridge would cease their play and call to him:

"Bonjour, Monsieur le Seneschal!"

And he would reply, laughingly:

"Enjoy yourselves, children, until you are whipped."

"Yes, Monsieur le Seneschal."

Thus he made the province so contented and so free from robbers that there were only twenty-two malefactors hanged during the winter, the year of the great overflowing of the Loire, not counting a Jew who was burned in the commune of Châteauneuf for stealing the Sacrament, or buying it, so it was said, for he was rich.

One day in the following year, about Saint-John's day,—*Saint-Jean qui fauche*, as we say in Touraine,—there came bands of Egyptians, Bohemians, or other

thieving folk, who stole many things consecrated to Saint-Martin, and left in the stead and place of Madame the Virgin, to heap insult and mockery upon our true faith, an impure girl, beautiful and quite naked, of the age of an old dog,—a strolling player and dark-skinned like themselves. The king's servitors and they of the Church did agree that the Moorish woman should pay the penalty of this nameless crime, should be burned and roasted alive in Saint-Martin's Square, near the fountain, where the Hay Market is. Thereupon, Goodman Bruyn did clearly and adroitly prove, in contradiction of the rest, that it would be a profitable thing and most grateful to God to win over that African soul to the true religion; but that, if the devil who abode in that female body should be obstinate, then the fagots should not fail to consume him, as said the decree. The which the good archbishop deemed to be wisely conceived, most canonical, and to Christian charity and the Gospel most conformable. The ladies of the town and other persons in authority cried out that they would be cheated of a fine ceremony, for that the Moorish woman was weeping her life out in the prison, bleating like a hobbled goat, and would surely be converted to God in order to live on like a crow, if the choice was hers to make. To which the seneschal made answer, that, if the stranger should choose devoutly to give herself to the Christian religion, then would there be a far more splendid ceremony, and that he would promise to make it even regally magnificent, for he would be her

godfather in baptism and she should have a virgin for her godmother, the better to please God, forasmuch as he himself was deemed to be a *cocquebin*. In our province of Touraine, we call thus chaste young men, unmarried or so esteemed, to distinguish them from married men or widowers; but the maids can easily detect them without the name, for they are more light-hearted and joyous than those sprinkled with the salt of marriage.

The Moor did not hesitate between the stake and the water of baptism. She liked better to be a living Christian than a burned gipsy; and so, to avoid being roasted for a moment, she was doomed to have a fire at her heart all her life long: for, the better to assure her religious principles, she was placed in the nunnery near Chardonneret, and there took a vow of sanctity. The said ceremony ended at the archbishop's palace, where, for this once, there was much dancing in honor of the Saviour of mankind, by the lords and ladies of Touraine, a land where people dance more and eat more, where there are more great banquets and more merrymaking than in any other in the whole world. The good old seneschal had chosen for godmother the daughter of the Lord of Azay-le-Ridel, afterward called Azay-le-Brulé, which said lord, having joined the Crusade, was left before Acre, a very distant city, in the hands of a Saracen who demanded a royal ransom, for that the said lord was of noble and dignified mien.

The lady of Azay, having pledged her fief to the Jews and extortioners in order to procure the sum,

was left without a sou, awaiting her lord's return in a poor house in the town, without a rug to sit upon, but proud as the Queen of Sheba and brave as a hound defending his master's goods. Seeing her great destitution, the seneschal went to the Demoiselle d'Azay and with delicacy requested her to be godmother to the aforesaid Egyptian, that he might as of right assist her, the lady of Azay. Now, he possessed a heavy chain of gold, obtained at the fall of Cyprus, the which he proposed to clasp about his charming co-sponsor's neck; but upon it he hung his estates and his white hair, his gold bezants, and his hackneys; in fine, he there placed his all, when he had seen Blanche d'Azay dance a *pavane* among the ladies of Tours. Although the Moorish woman, thinking that it was her last day, had surprised the assemblage by her twirling and pirouetting and leaping and *tours de force*, Blanche surpassed her in the opinion of all, so modestly and daintily did she dance.

Now, Bruyn, as he gazed admiringly upon this gentle maiden whose ankles seemed to fear the floor and who enjoyed herself with the ingenuous pleasure of her seventeen years, like a grasshopper trying his chirp, was seized by an old man's desire, the spasmodic and vigorous desire of feebleness, which made him tingle from the sole of his foot to his neck, but no higher, for on his head was too much snow for love to tarry there. Thereupon did the good man discover that he needed a wife in his manor-house, and it seemed to his fancy more gloomy than it

really was. For what is a castle without a châtelaine?—as well have a bell without its tongue. In fine, a wife was the only thing he had to wish for: and he must have her speedily, for should the lady of Azay put him off, he was like to pass from this world to the next. But during the baptismal merry-making he paid little heed to his grievous wounds and even less to the full eighty years which had bared his head; he found that his eyes were bright enough for him to see very plainly the young god-mother, who, in obedience to the commands of the lady of Azay, her mother, regaled him right well with eye and gesture, thinking that there could be no danger with so old a fellow. So that Blanche, all artless and prim as she was, unlike all the damsels of Touraine, who are as wide awake as a spring morning, allowed the goodman to kiss first her hand and afterward her neck, a little low as the archbishop said, who married them the next week; and it was a beautiful wedding and a more beautiful bride!

Now, Blanche was the slenderest and blithesomest maiden in the whole world; and, better still, she was innocent as never virgin was before; so innocent that she knew not what love was, nor how nor why it was; so innocent that she wondered that some people lingered slothfully in bed; so innocent that she believed that children came from Savoy cabbages. Her mother had reared her thus in all innocence, nor allowed her to reason on so small a matter as the way of pouring soup between her

teeth. Thus she was a spotless flower of girlhood, light-hearted and ingenuous, an angel who lacked only wings to fly away to Paradise. And when she went from her weeping mother's poor abode to consummate her betrothal at the cathedral of Saint-Gatien and Saint-Maurice, the countryfolk flocked to feast their eyes with a sight of the bride and the carpets laid along Rue de la Scellerie, one and all declared that never had tinier feet trodden the soil of Touraine, never had lovelier blue eyes gazed upon the sky, and never had the street been adorned with carpets and flowers for a more splendid festival. The young women of the town and of Saint-Martin and the village of Châteauneuf all envied the long tawny tresses with which they doubted not Blanche had fished for her count; but they coveted as much, aye more, the robe of cloth of gold, the precious stones from over-sea, the white diamonds and the chains with which the child played, and which bound her forever to the seneschal. The old trooper was so stimulated in her presence that his joy shone through all his wrinkles, in his every glance and movement. Although he was no straighter than a pruning-hook, he stood erect beside Blanche, until you would have taken him for a lansquenet on parade, waiting to be reviewed; and he put his hand to his diaphragm like one suffocated and tortured by pleasure. When they heard the bells ring merrily, and the procession, the splendors, and the billing and cooing of the said wedding, of which people talked long after, the damsels longed for

whole crops of Moorish women, for showers of seneschals and basketfuls of Egyptian baptisms; but this was the only one that ever took place in Touraine, for that country is far from Egypt and Bohemia. The lady of Azay received a large sum of money after the ceremony, whereby she profited to go with all speed to Acre to her husband, accompanied by the Comte de la Roche-Corbon's lieutenant and men-at-arms, whom the said count supplied with everything. She set out on the wedding-day, having placed her daughter in the seneschal's hands, beseeching him to treat her well; later, she returned with the lord of Azay, who was a leper, and cured him by nursing him herself, at the risk of becoming as ugly as he; for which she was much admired.

Now, when the nuptials were once done and ended,—for they lasted three days, to the great joy of the people,—Messire Bruyn did, in high state, escort the maid to his castle; and, according to the custom of married folk, did solemnly put her to bed in his bed which was by the Abbé de Marmoustiers duly blessed; then came he to lie beside her in the great seignorial chamber of La Roche-Corbon, which said chamber had been hung with green brocade with gold fringe. When old Bruyn, all perfumed, found himself flesh to flesh with his lovely bride, he kissed her first of all on the brow, then on the little round white bosom, at the self-same spot where she had let him fasten the clasp of the chain; but that was all. The old buck was overweening in the thought that

he could do the rest; whereupon he bade love be still, despite the merry nuptial songs, epithalamia, and bawdy jests which he could hear below, in the halls where they still danced. He sought comfort in a cup of the marriage beverage which had been blessed, as custom ordained, and was placed near them in a golden goblet; the spices warmed his stomach, 'tis true, but not the heart of his sluggish breeches. Nor did Blanche wonder at her spouse's crime against love, for that she was a virgin in mind, and of marriage saw naught save that which is visible to a maid's eyes, as gowns, horses, merry-makings, to be a lady and mistress of the manor, to have a countesship, to be happy and to give orders; and so, child that she was, she was wild with joy with the gold tassels of the bed, and the trinkets, and marvelled greatly at the richness of the tomb wherein her virginity was to be interred. Conscious of his fault a little tardily, and trusting to the future, albeit the future would impair a little every day the powers of that upon which he relied to regale his wife, the seneschal sought to make words supply the place of acts. Wherefore he prattled to his wife on every subject, promised her the keys of his wardrobes, his granaries, and his chests, the absolute control of all his lands and houses, without any interference; hanging around her neck the slice of bread, as the saying is in Touraine. She was like a young, well-fed battle-horse; considered her goodman the most gallant of men; and, sitting up in bed, she smiled and looked with

yet greater joy upon the bed of green brocade, wherein it was lawful and right for her to sleep thereafter every night. Thereupon, seeing that she was ready to play, her crafty lord, who had fallen in with few virgins in his day, and who knew, by long experience, what monkeys women are in bed, forasmuch as he had always foregathered with wenches, —dreaded the play of the hands, the stray kisses, and the trifling favors of love, wherein he never was found wanting in the old days, but which now would have found him cold as a pope's *obit.* Wherefore he withdrew toward the edge of the bed, fearful of his good-fortune, and said to his too delectable spouse:

"So here you are seneschale, my love, and right well *seneschalled,* in very truth."

"Oh! no!" she replied.

"Why no?" said he, in a great fright, "are you not a *dame?*"

"No," said she again. "Nor shall be till I have a child."

"Saw you the fields as we came hither?" rejoined the good seneschal.

"Yes."

"Well, they are yours."

"Oho!" she laughed, "I shall enjoy myself greatly catching butterflies there."

"'Tis well thought of," said the lord, "and the woods?"

"Oh! I should not dare go thither alone, and you shall take me. But give me a sip of that liquor

which La Ponneuse compounded for us with so great care."

"Why, my love? you would kindle a fire in your body."

"Oh! but I will have it," she said, biting her lip with anger, "because I wish to give you a child as soon as possible; and I am sure that that liquor is for that purpose."

"Ouf! my pet," said the seneschal, knowing from this that Blanche was a virgin from head to foot, "God's favor is the first essential for that result; and then a woman needs must be in the harvest season."

"And when shall I be in the harvest season?" she asked, smiling.

"When it is nature's will," he said, meaning a jest.

"And what must be done to that end?"

"Ah! a cabalistic and alchemical operation, which is most dangerous."

"Even so," she said with a thoughtful air, "that, then, is the reason that my mother wept for the metamorphosis; but Berthe de Preuilly, who is grateful to God for being changed into a wife, told me that there is nothing easier in the world."

"That depends on the age," replied the old lord. "But saw you in the stables the beautiful white hackney of which so much is said in Touraine?"

"Yes, she is very kind and gentle."

"Well, I give her to you; and you may ride her whenever such is your pleasure."

"Oh! you are very good, and they did not speak falsely who told me so."

"In this castle, my love," he continued, "the butler, the chaplain, the treasurer, the equerry, the cook, the steward, aye, even Sire de Montsoreau, the young knave whose name is Gauttier and who bears my banner, with his men-at-arms, captains, servants, and cattle,—all are yours and will follow your orders incontinently, under pain of being plagued with a halter."

"But," she rejoined, "this alchemical operation —might it not be done forthwith?"

"Oh! no," the seneschal replied. "For that it is of the first necessity that we be both in a state of perfect grace before God in everything; else should we have a child of evil, laden with sins; the which is forbidden by the canons of the Church. That is why there are so many incorrigible knaves in the world. Their parents have not with prudence looked to it that their own souls were pure and have given impure souls to their children: the fair and virtuous are born of stainless parents. That is why we cause our beds to be blessed, as this was blessed by Abbé de Marmoustiers. Have you not sinned against the ordinances of the Church?"

"Oh! no," she made answer eagerly, "I received absolution for all my sins before the mass; and since, I have not committed the tiniest peccadillo."

"You are very perfect!" cried the crafty lord, "and enchanted am I to have you to wife; but I have blasphemed like a heathen."

"Oh! oh! for what reason?"

"Because the dance did not end, and I could not have you to myself, to bring you hither and kiss you."

Thereupon he gallantly seized her hands and devoured them with caresses, whispering to her endearing, affectionate words, which, albeit on the surface, made her quite happy and content.

Then, as she was wearied with the dancing and all the ceremonial, she lay down once more, saying to the seneschal:

"I will keep watch to-morrow, to see that you commit no sin."

And she left her old husband greatly enamored of her fair beauty, and of her refined nature, and no less embarrassed to know how he should keep her in her state of ignorance than to understand why beeves masticate their food twice over. Although he had no augury of good to come, it so inflamed him to look upon the exquisite charms of Blanche, during her sweet and innocent slumber, that he resolved to guard and defend this pretty jewel of love. He kissed her, with tears in his eyes,—her fair golden tresses, her lovely eyelids, her ripe red lips,—very softly withal, lest he should waken her!—And that was his whole harvest, mute joys which burned his heart, while Blanche was in no wise moved thereby. And so he bewailed the snows of his leafless old age, poor man, for well he saw that God had diverted Himself by giving him nuts when he no longer had teeth.

HOW THE SENESCHAL DID BATTLE WITH HIS WIFE'S VIRGINITY

During the early days of his marriage, the seneschal devised many noteworthy falsehoods wherewith to deceive his wife's too gullible innocence. Firstly, he found in his functions as justiciary a valid excuse for leaving her often alone; secondly, he devoted himself to the pleasures of the country, and took her to the grape-harvesting in his vineyards at Vouvray; in fine, he cajoled her with a thousand foolish tales.

Sometimes he said that nobles did not act like common folk; that the children of counts were sown only at the conjunction of certain celestial bodies, calculated by learned astronomers; sometimes that one should abstain from making children on feast-days, because it was violent labor; and he kept all feast-days like a man who was resolved to enter paradise unhindered. Sometimes he declared that if, perchance, the parents were not in a state of grace, children begun on Sainte-Claire's Day would be blind; on Saint-Genou's Day, would have the gout; on Saint-Aignan's Day, the itch; on Saint-Roch's Day, the plague; sometimes that those born in February were always cold; in March, too active; in April, were good for nothing at all, and that fine boys were hatched in May. In fine, he chose that his child should be perfect, should have hair of two

colors; and for this all the requisite conditions must needs be fulfilled. At other times, he told Blanche that it was a man's right to give his wife a child according to his sole will; and that, if she prided herself on being a virtuous woman, she must conform to her husband's will; lastly, that she must wait until the return of the lady of Azay, that she might be present at her lying-in. From all of which Blanche divined that the seneschal was annoyed by her requests and therein, mayhap, was right, seeing that he was old and of ripe experience; wherefore she was resigned, and thought no more, save by herself, of the so-earnestly desired child, that is to say, that she thought always of it, as when a woman hath a longing in her brain, nor dreamed that she was doing as wantons do and strumpets running after pleasure. One evening, by mere chance, Bruyn spoke of children, which subject he shunned as cats shun water; but he complained of a boy condemned by him that morning for flagrant wrong-doing, saying that of a surety he was the offspring of parents laden with mortal sins.

"La! said Blanche, "an you but give me one, though you have not absolution, yet will I chasten him to such good purpose that you will be content with him."

Thereupon the count saw that his wife was bitten by a hot caprice, and that it was time to do battle with her virginity, in order to make himself master thereof, exterminate it, pummel it, lash it about, or to assuage and extinguish it.

"How now, my love, do you wish to be a mother?" said he. "You know not as yet the duties of châtelaine, are not accustomed to the rôle of mistress of this castle."

"Oh! oh!" she cried. "To be a perfect countess and to carry in my loins a little count, must I play the châtelaine? That will I do, and straightway."

Then did Blanche, to obtain an heir, hunt the stag and doe; leaping ditches, riding her hackney over hill and dale, through woods and fields; taking much pleasure in watching her falcons fly and unhooding them, and carrying them deftly on her dainty wrist, hunting always. The which was as the seneschal would have it. But Blanche, in this diversion, acquired the appetite of a nun and bishop, wishing, that is, to procreate, whetting her energies, and scarce bridling her hunger, when, on her return, she gave her teeth full play. And so, by dint of reading the legends written along the roads, and unravelling by death the secret of the inchoate loves of birds and beasts, she performed a mystery of natural alchemy, heightening the color of her complexion and over-exciting her nutritive juices; the which did little pacify her bellicose nature and much inflamed her desire, which laughed and prayed and frolicked right merrily. The seneschal had thought to disarm his lady's rebellious virginity, by leading her to ride about the country; but his craft resulted ill, for the strange love which flowed through Blanche's veins came forth more sturdy from these assaults, challenging jousts and tourneys like a page

arrayed as a mailed knight. Then the worthy lord saw that he had gone astray and that there was no pleasant spot on a gridiron. Nor did he know whereon to feed virtue that had grown so painfully robust; for the more he wearied it the livelier it was. From this conflict there must needs result one vanquished and one scar, a devilish scar, which he would fain avert from his countenance until after his decease, God aiding. The poor seneschal was even now scarce able to follow his lady in the hunting-field and not be unhorsed. He sweated freely under his harness, and well-nigh expired in that spot wherein his frisky wife renewed her life and took much joy. Many times, in the evening, she would dance. Now, the goodman, swathed in his heavy garments, was utterly exhausted by these manœuvres in which he was forced to share, whether to give her his hand when she danced the Moorish woman's rigadoons or to hold the lighted torch when it pleased her fancy to dance by torchlight; and, in despite of his sciatics, apostemes, and rheumatics, he perforce must smile and make pretty and gallant speeches to her after all the torsions, mummery, and comic pantomime she played for her diversion; for he loved her so madly that, had she asked him for an elephant, he would straightway have gone in quest of it.

Nevertheless, one fine day he found that his loins were in too enfeebled a state to contend with his wife's vivacious nature; and, humbling himself before the said Sieur Virginity, he resolved to let

everything take its course, counting a little on Blanche's modest piety and sense of shame; but still slept with but one eye, for he misdoubted that God made virginities to be snared, as partridges to be spitted and roasted. One moist morning, when the weather was of the sort when snails break out their paths, melancholy weather and fit for musing, Blanche sat in her chair, deep in thought, for that nothing produces more active coctions of the essential elements, nor is any receipt, specific, or philter more penetrating, trans-penetrating, ultra-penetrating, and titillating than the subtle warmth that simmers 'twixt the down of a chair and that of a maid who has sate for some time. And so was the countess unwittingly discommoded by her virginity, which turned her brain topsy-turvy and nibbled at her everywhere.

Whereat the goodman, sore grieved to see her languishing, sought to banish thoughts which were the essence of extra-conjugal love.

"Whence comes your grief, my love?" he said.

"From shame."

"What shames you, pray?"

"The not being a good woman, in this, that I am childless and you without an heir! Is one a wife without offspring? Nay, nay! For look you! All my neighbors have offspring; and I married to have them, even as you married to give me them. The lords of Touraine are all amply supplied with children; and their wives make them by potfuls, you alone have none! We shall be mocked at, I say!

What will become of your name? and your fiefs and your seignories? A child is our natural companion; it is our delight to cosset him, fondle him, swaddle him, dress and undress him, coddle him, dandle him, rock him, put him to bed, take him up, nurse him; and I feel that, had I but the half of one, I would kiss him, bathe him, swaddle him, unharness him, and make him laugh and jump the livelong day, as ladies do."

"Were it not that women die while bearing them, and that you are still too slender and too close-built for it, you would be a mother ere this!" replied the seneschal, dazed by this flow of words. "But will you not buy one that has come? It will cost you neither pain nor trouble."

"In good sooth," said she, "I crave the pain and trouble; lacking which it would not be our child. Well I know that it must issue from me, for at the church they say that Jesus was the issue of the Virgin's womb."

"Then, let us pray God that so it may be!" cried the seneschal; "and intercede with our Lady of Esgrignolles. Many a woman hath conceived after *neuvaines;* you must not fail to perform them."

Thereupon, Blanche set forth for Our Lady of Esgrignolles the self-same day, attired like a queen, riding her beauteous hackney, dressed in her robe of green velvet, laced with laces of fine gold, open at the breast, with scarlet sleeves, tiny pattens, a tall hood adorned with precious stones, and a golden girdle that outlined her figure, slender

as a pole. She purposed giving her dress to the Virgin, and, in very truth, promised it to her for the day of her churching. Sire de Montsoreau rode before her, his eye, keen as a hawk's, bidding all passers-by give place, and ensuring, with his horsemen, the safety of the journey. Near Marmoustiers, the seneschal, made drowsy by the heat,—for it was August,—tottered on his charger like a diadem on a cow's head, and seeing so blithesome and so pretty a lady beside so old a buck, a countrywoman, who leaned against a tree, drinking water from her stone jug, asked a toothless hag, who groaned pitifully while she gleaned, if that princess was on her way to drown Death.

"*Nenny!*" said the old hag. "'Tis our lady of La Roche-Corbon, the wife of the seneschal of Poitou and Touraine, in quest of a child."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the young woman, like a released fly.

Then, pointing to the sprightly youth who was at the head of the procession:

"He who rides at the head will do for her, she will save candles and vows."

"Hau! little one," replied the hag, "much I wonder that she goes to Our Lady of Esgrignolles, seeing that the priests there be so ugly. Well might she bide a space in the shadow of the bell-tower of Marmoustiers; she would soon be fruitful, the good fathers are so gamesome."

"A fig for your monks!" said a woman reaper, waking up. "Look you! Sire de Montsoreau is a

fiery and pretty gallant enough to open that lady's heart, the more as 'tis split already."

Whereat they all began to laugh. Sire de Montsoreau would have gone to them and hanged them to a linden by the roadside to punish them for their evil words; but Blanche hastily cried out:

"Oh! messire, do not hang them yet! They have not said all; and on our return we will consider."

She blushed, and Sire de Montsoreau gazed into her very soul as if to instil in her the mystic comprehension of love; but the enlightening of her mind was already begun by the remarks of the peasants, which bore fruit in her understanding. The said virginity was like tinder, and there was need of but a word to kindle it.

Now, therefore, did Blanche remark notable physical differences between the qualities of her aged spouse and the perfections of the said Gauttier, which gentleman bore nowise heavily his twenty-three years, sat straight as a ninepin in his saddle, and wide awake as the first stroke of Matins, whereas the seneschal, contrariwise, did doze; being of good courage, too, and adroit, where his master was faint-hearted. He was one of those bedizened youths whom the hussies wear at night with more pleasure than a nightcap, for they no longer fear fleas; some there be who speak harshly of them, but we must blame no one, for every man hath the right to sleep as he will.

So deeply did the seneschal's lady think and to such right good purpose, that, ere they reached the

bridge of Tours, she loved Gauttier secretly and hypocritically, as a virgin loves, knowing not what love is. Thus she became a good woman, desiring, that is, the goods of another, the best that men have. She fell sick with love, going at the first bound to the very bottom of her misery, forasmuch as all is aflame between the first itching and the last desire. And she knew not, as she then learned, that through the eyes a subtle essence could enter, causing mighty corrosions in all the veins of the body, lobes of the heart, nerves of the limbs, cells of the brain, pores of the skin, transpirations of the tissue, roots of the hair, sinuosities of the entrails, tubes of the hypochondriac and other regions, which in her were of a sudden dilated, heated, titillated, poisoned, pricked, harrowed up, and squirming, as if a thousand basketfuls of needles were inside her. It was a virgin's desire, a full-grown desire, which so disturbed her sight that she no longer saw her old spouse, but young Gauttier, in whom nature was as generous as an abbé's vainglorious chin.

When the goodman entered Tours, the *Ha! ha!* of the crowd awakened him; and in great state came he with his train to the church of Our Lady of Esgrignolles, once called *La Greigneur*, as if you should say: She who hath the most merit. Blanche went to the chapel where prayers to God and the Virgin for children were wont to be offered up; and entered the said chapel alone, as the custom was, albeit in the presence of the seneschal, their retainers and divers curious folk, who stood before the grated

door. When the countess saw the priest draw nigh, who had in charge to say the masses for children and to receive the vows, she asked him if there were many barren women. To which the good priest made answer that there was no reason to complain, and that the children were a source of much revenue to the church.

"And do you frequently see," pursued Blanche, "young wives with husbands so old as monseigneur?"

"Rarely."

"But have they children?"

"Always!" replied the priest, smiling.

"And the others whose mates are younger?"

"Sometimes."

"Oho!" she cried. "Then there is greater surety with such a one as the seneschal?"

"Even so," said the priest.

"Why?" she asked.

"Madame," the priest gravely made answer, "before that age, God alone has a hand in it; later, men take a hand."

At this time, it was the truth that all wisdom had taken refuge in the clergy. Blanche made her vow, which was a most handsome one, seeing that her garments were worth full two thousand gold crowns.

"You are very merry!" said the seneschal to her, when, as they were returning, she made her hackney prance and leap and curvet.

"Ah! yes," she replied. "I no longer doubt of

having a child, since others must take a hand as the priest hath said; I will take Gauttier—"

The seneschal would have liked to return and slay the monk; but he reflected that that would be a crime which would cost him too dear; and he resolved to plot his revenge shrewdly with the archbishop's aid. Then, ere they came in sight of the roofs of La Roche-Corbon, he had bidden Sire de Montsoreau go and seek the seclusion of his own province, the which young Gauttier did, knowing his lord's strange ways. The seneschal took unto himself, in the stead and place of the said Gauttier, the son of Sire de Jallanges, whose fief was an appurtenance of La Roche-Corbon. He was a youth named René, approaching fourteen years, whom he made his page until he should reach the age to be his esquire; and gave the command of his men-at-arms to an old cripple with whom he had travelled much in Palestine and other lands. Thus the goodman thought to avoid putting on the horned emblem of cuckoldry, to be able still to saddle, bridle, and curb the refractory virginity of his lady, who struggled like a mule caught in his rope.

THAT WHICH IS ONLY A VENIAL SIN

On the Sunday next following the coming of René to the manor of La Roche-Corbon, Blanche went forth to hunt without her goodman; and when she was in the forest, near Les Carneaux, saw a monk who seemed to be pushing a girl more roughly than

was needful; and she urged her horse forward, calling to her people:

"Hau! hau! do not let him kill her!"

But when she came near them, she quickly drew rein, and the sight of what the monk carried prevented her from hunting. She rode pensively homeward; and thereupon the dark lantern of her intelligence opened and received a bright gleam which cast light upon innumerable things, as church pictures and others, *fabliaux* and ballads of the troubadours, and the antics of birds. Of a sudden she discovered the sweet mystery of love that is written in all tongues, even that of the carp. Is it not rank folly thus to seek to conceal this knowledge from maidens! No sooner was Blanche in bed than she said to the seneschal:

"Bruyn, you have cozened me, and you should deal with me as the monk of Les Carneaux with the maid."

Old Bruyn misdoubted the adventure, and well he saw that his evil hour had struck. He gazed at Blanche with too much fire in his eyes for the same ardor to exist lower, and softly made answer:

"La! my love! when I took you to wife, I had more love than manly vigor, and I counted on your compassion and virtue. 'Tis the great sorrow of my life to feel that all my power is in my heart alone. This sorrow hurries me toward death, faster and faster, that you may be the sooner free! Await my departure from this world. 'Tis the only request which he makes who is your master, and who might

command, but whose choice it is to be only your first minister and servitor. Betray not the honor of my white hairs! There be lords who have slain their wives at such times."

"Alas! will you kill me?" she said.

"Nay," the old man replied, "I love thee too well, sweetheart. Why, thou art the very flower of my old age, the joy of my heart! Thou art my well-beloved daughter. The sight of thee comforts my weary eyes; and from thee I can endure everything, even a sorrow, as well as a joy. I give thee full license in all things, if only thou dost not afflict too heavily poor Bruyn, who hath made thee a great lady, wealthy and held in honor. Wilt thou not be a beauteous widow? Ah! thy happiness will soften the pangs of death."

And he found in his dry eyes a tear which rolled all hot down his pine-cone colored cheek, and fell upon Blanche's hand, who, being touched to see the great love of this old husband who would step into the grave for her pleasure, cried, laughing:

"Nay, nay! weep not, I will wait!"

Thereupon the seneschal kissed her hands and regaled her with little dove-like endearments, saying in a trembling voice:

"If thou didst but know, Blanche, my love, how in thy sleep I devour thee with caresses, now here, now there!"

And the old monkey fondled her with his two hands, which were veritable charnel-houses.

"And," he continued, "I dared not rouse the

tiger that would have strangled my happiness, since at this trade of love naught but my heart takes fire."

"Ah!" she replied, "you can dandle me thus, even when my eyes are open, for it in nowise affects me."

Upon that, the poor seneschal, seizing the little dagger that lay on the night-table, gave it to her, saying wildly:

"Kill me, my love, or let me think that thou lovest me a little."

"Yes! yes!" she cried in deadly terror. "I will see to it that I love you much."

Thus did that young virginity seize upon the old man and enslave him; for, in the name of that sweet field of Venus, which lay fallow, Blanche, with the cunning natural to women, made her old Bruyn run to and fro like a miller's mule. "My good Bruyn, I want this. Bruyn, I want that. Come hither! Bruyn! Bruyn!"—and always Bruyn! So that Bruyn was more maltreated by his wife's kindness than he would have been by her disfavor. She tortured his brain, insisting that everything should be of crimson, making him turn everything upside-down at the slightest movement of her eyebrows; and when she was sad, the seneschal, beside himself, would say to everyone, as he sat in judgment: "Hang him!" Another would have burst like a fly in this virginal battle; but there was in Bruyn's nature so much of iron that it was no easy matter to make an end of him. One night,

when Blanche had set everything in the castle by the ears, harassed men and beasts, and by her teasing humor would have driven the Almighty Father to desperation, who has great store of patience, seeing that He abides us, she said as she went to bed:

"My good Bruyn, I have fancies down here which bite and prick me, go thence to my heart, set fire to my brain, urge me on to evil things; and I dream by night of the monk of Les Carneaux."

"My love," the seneschal said, "these be wiles of the devil and temptations, against which monks and nuns know how to defend themselves. Wherefore, if you would ensure your salvation, go and confess to the worthy Abbé de Marmoustiers, our neighbor; he will give you good counsel and guide you piously in the straight path."

"I will go to-morrow," she said.

And, in truth, at daybreak, she made haste to the abbey of the good monks, who, marvelling to see so sweet a lady under their roof, did more than one sin that night, but presently led her with great rejoicing to their reverend abbé.

Blanche found the goodman in a secret garden, near the cliff, under a cool grotto, and was stricken with respectful awe at the holy man's countenance, albeit she was accustomed to pay no great heed to gray hairs.

"God keep you, madame!" he said. "What come you to seek so near death, you so young?"

"Your priceless advice," she said, making a reverence. "And, if it be your pleasure to lead so

untractable a lamb, I shall be well content to have so virtuous a confessor."

"My child," the monk replied, with whom old Bruyn had plotted this hypocrisy and the part he was to play, "had I not the cold of a hundred winters on this hairless head, I could not endure to listen to your sins; but say on, and if you go to paradise, it shall be through my labors."

Thereupon the seneschale hastened to confess the trifling sins of her store, and when she had purged herself of her petty iniquities, she came to the postscript of her confession.

"Ah! my father," she said, "I have to confess that I am tortured every day by the longing to have a child. Is that wicked?"

"No," said the abbé.

"But," she continued, "my husband is by nature commanded not to use his wealth to make paupers, as the old women say by the roadside."

"Then," the priest replied, "you must lead a virtuous life and abstain from such thoughts as these."

"But I have heard the lady of Jallanges declare that it was no sin, when from it one derived neither pleasure nor profit."

"There is always pleasure!" said the abbé. "But count you not the child a profit? Now, mark well that it will be always a mortal sin before God and a crime before men to graft on one's self a child through the commerce of a man to whom one is not canonically married. Wherefore those women

who contravene the holy laws of marriage suffer great harm therefor in the other world, and are subjected to horrid monsters, with sharp and tearing claws, who burn them in many furnaces, in memory of their having warmed their hearts here on earth a little beyond the law."

With that, Blanche scratched her ear; and having reflected a moment, said to the priest:

"Prithee, what did the Virgin Mary?"

"Ah!" replied the abbé, "that is a mystery."

"And what is a mystery?"

"Something which cannot be explained, and which we must believe without any questioning."

"And pray, could not I make a mystery?" queried she.

"That has happened but once," said the abbé, "forasmuch as it was the Son of God."

"Alas! my father, is it God's will that I die? or that, from being of sound and healthy understanding, I become crackbrained? Of which there is great peril. Now that things stir about and inflame one another within me, I am no longer in my senses, nor care for aught; and, to go to a man, I would leap walls, traverse fields, without shame, and would lay everything in ruins just to see that which blazed so bright in the monk of Les Carneaux. And, during these fits of frenzy which excite me and prick me in mind and body, there is neither God nor devils nor husband; I stamp, I run, I break tubs, pots, ostrich-house, barnyard, household stuff, and everything, in suchwise that I cannot tell it. But I dare not

confess all my wrong-doing, because, even while I speak of it, I have water in my mouth, and the thing, God's curse upon it! itches wofully. This madness snaps at me and pricks me and slays my virtue. Tell me, will God damn me, who hath nailed this great love in my body?"

At these words, it was the priest's turn to scratch his ear, sore perplexed by the lamentations, profound wisdom, controversial spirit, and keen intelligence which this virginity concealed.

"My child," said he, "God hath distinguished us from the beasts, and given us a paradise to win; and, for this, hath given us reason which is a helm to steer us against the tempest of our ambitious desires. And there is a means to transfer the evil from one's brain by fasting, excessive toil, and other sage courses. And, instead of fretting and snapping like a little girl let loose, you must pray to the Virgin, lie on the hard floor, mend your housekeeping, and be not idle."

"Ah! my father, when I am in my chair at church, I see neither priest nor altar, but only the child Jesus, who renews my taste for the thing. But, when all is said, what if my head is turned, my understanding unhorsed, and I am in the bird-lime of love?"

"If such were the case," said the abbé imprudently, "you would be in the plight of Sainte Lidoire, who sleeping one day very sound, one leg here, one there, in an hour of intense heat, and lightly clad, was approached by a young man full of

wickedness, who, stepping softly, got her with child; and as the said saint was absolutely ignorant of this trespass and much surprised to be brought to bed, thinking that the swelling of her pouch was a grievous disease, she did penance therefor as for a venial sin, seeing that she had derived no pleasure from this vile trick, according to the declaration of the miscreant, who said on the scaffold where he was put to death, that the saint did in nowise stir—"

"Oh! my father," she cried, "be sure that I would stir no more than she did!"

With that she tripped away, blithesome and full of grace, with a smile on her lips, and thinking that she, too, might commit a venial sin. On returning from the great convent, she saw in the castle courtyard young Jallanges, who, under the eye of the old esquire, was circling and caracoling on a fine horse, adapting himself to the movements of the beast, riding back and forth, with quick turnings and swift onsets, exceeding graceful, erect in his saddle, and so pretty, so agile, so supple as to defy description; to such a degree, in very truth, that he would have kindled desire in Queen Lucrece, who killed herself, for that she had been debauched against her will.

"Ah!" said Blanche to herself, "if only yonder page were past fifteen, I could sleep very sound when he was near."

And so, notwithstanding the great youth of that pretty servitor, during the collation and the supper, she glanced many times at René's black fleece, his white skin, and graceful figure; especially at his

eyes wherein there was an abundance of limpid warmth and a bright fire of life, which he feared to discharge, poor child!

Now, in the evening, as the seneschale sat musing in her chair in the chimney-corner, old Bruyn questioned her of her thoughts.

"I am thinking," she said, "that you must have borne arms in love very early in the morning to be thus early worn out."

"Oh!" he replied, smiling like all men when questioned of their amorous memories, "at the age of thirteen and a half, I got my mother's maid with child."

Blanche desired no more, thinking that René the page must be amply provided; hence was overjoyed, plied the goodman with cajoleries, and rolled about in her mute desire, as a cake is rolled in flour.

HOW AND BY WHOM SAID CHILD WAS MADE

The seneschale did not muse overlong on the means of arousing speedily the page's love, and soon found the natural ambuscade wherein the stoutest are always taken. In this wise: in the heated portion of the day the goodman took his siesta in the Saracen fashion, a custom which he had never abandoned since his return from the Holy Land. Meanwhile, Blanche was alone in the fields or worked at the trivial occupations of women, as embroidering and spinning; and most often remained

THE VENIAL SIN

"I would know if you are well taught by your master. Think you not that the Virgin is beautiful?" she asked him, smiling, when he held in his hand the illuminated Hours, all brilliant with gold and azure.

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in the living-room, looking to the washing and arranging the linen, or wandered here and there as her fancy willed. She set aside that silent hour, therefore, for completing the page's education, making him read in books and say his prayers to her. And so, on the morrow, on the stroke of noon, when the seneschal was sleeping, who succumbed to the sun, which scorches with its brightest beams the hill of La Roche-Corbon, so that one must doze perforce, unless one is fanned, serenaded, and vigorously stung by a devil of virginity. Blanche, then, perched herself most daintily in her goodman's great seignorial chair, which was none too high, forasmuch as she reckoned upon the advantages of perspective. The sly jade arranged herself adroitly, like a swallow in its nest, and artfully rested her head on her arm, like a sleeping child; but, while making her preparations, she held open two witching eyes that smiled and made merry in advance at the secret little thrills of joy, shudderings, peepings, and ecstasies of the page who was soon to lie at her feet, separated from her by no greater distance than an old flea's leap. In sooth, she drew so near to her the velvet cushion whereon the poor child was to kneel, whose heart and life she toyed with as she willed, that, had he been a saint of stone, his eyes would have been forced to follow the folds of the dress, the better to see and admire the perfections and beauties of the slender leg which to the seneschale's white hose gave shape and form. Needs must, therefore, a poor retainer fall into a snare wherein the stoutest

knight would gladly have been taken. When she had turned and turned again, arranged and re-arranged her body, and found the position in which the said snare was most invitingly laid, she softly cried: "O René!"

René, whom she well knew to be in the *salle des gardes*, failed not to run to her, and of a sudden showed his dark head between the hangings of the doorway.

"What is your pleasure?" said the page.

And, with great respect, he held in his hand his cap of crimson plush, less red than his rosy cheeks, fresh and dimpled.

"Come hither," she continued, in a faint voice, for the child bewitched her so that she was all breathless.

In very truth, never were precious stones more flashing than René's eyes, nor vellum whiter than his skin, nor woman so graceful in form. Moreover, as she was so near the fruition of her desire, so he seemed to her the more sweetly made; and be assured that the pretty game of love gleamed resplendent with all this youth, the bright sun, the silence, and all the rest.

"Read me the litanies of the Virgin," she said, pushing toward him a book that lay open on her prie-Dieu. "I would know if you are well taught by your master.—Think you not that the Virgin is beautiful?" she asked him, smiling, when he held in his hand the illuminated Hours, all brilliant with gold and azure.

"That is a painting," he replied, timidly, glancing shyly at his so gracious mistress.

"Read, read."

Thereupon, René turned his mind to reading the sweet and mystical litanies; but believe that Blanche's *Ora pro nobis* grew fainter and fainter, like the notes of the horn in the fields; and when the page resumed with ardor: "O mystery-laden Rose!" the châtelaine, who of a surety heard plainly, responded with a faint sigh. Thereupon, René misdoubted that his mistress slept. So he ventured to fix his eyes upon her, admiring her at leisure, and having no wish to sing any other anthem than one of love. His bliss made his heart leap and bound even to his throat; thus, as of right, did these virginities vie with each other in their ardor, and, had you seen them, you would never have thought to set the twain upon each other. René regaled himself with his eyes, devising in his mind a thousand schemes of fruition which brought water to the mouth of that comely offspring of love. In his ecstasy, he let fall the book, and thereat became shamefaced as a monk detected in childish mischief, yet knew by that means that Blanche was sleeping well and soundly; for she stirred not, nor would the sly minx have opened her eyes to far greater perils, but waited for something to fall other than the book of Hours. Lo! there is no fiercer longing than the longing for pregnancy! Now the page spied his lady's foot, which was prettily shod in a dainty shoe of a blue color. She had placed

it in a strange posture on a stool, seeing that in the seneschal's chair she was too high. This foot was of slender proportions, slightly curved, two fingers wide, and long as a sparrow, tail included, narrow at the toe, a veritable foot of delight, a virginal foot which deserved a kiss as a thief the halter; a roguish foot, a wanton foot to damn an archangel; a foot of good augury, a foot alluring as the devil, and which woke a desire to make two new ones, of the same pattern, to perpetuate in this vile world the beauteous works of God. The page was tempted to unshoe that persuasive foot. To this end, his eyes, blazing with all the fire of his years, went swiftly, like the tongue of a bell, from the said delectable foot to the sleeping face of his lady and mistress, listening to her slumber, drinking her breath; and time and again could not decide where a kiss would taste the sweeter: whether on the seneschale's fresh, red lips or on that speaking foot. At last, moved by respect or dread, or mayhap by great love, he made choice of the foot, and kissed it quickly, like a maiden who dares not. Then he hastily resumed the book, feeling his red cheeks grow yet more red; and, all excited by his pleasure, cried like unto a blind man: "*Janua cœli*, gate of heaven!"—But Blanche woke not, trusting that the page would go from the foot to the knee and thence upward into heaven. She was grievously disappointed when the litanies came to an end without other incident, and René, who thought that he had had too much happiness for one day, stole from the hall, full of the

subtle essence, richer in that venturesome kiss than a thief who hath robbed the poor-box.

When the seneschale was alone, she reflected that the page would be more than a little long at his task, if he amused himself singing the *Magnificat* at Matins. Wherefore she resolved on the morrow to raise her foot a little, and thus to reveal the nose of that feature which in Touraine is called perfect, because it is never exposed to the air and thus remains always fresh. Consider that the page, roasted by his desire, and all aflame with the fancies of the day before, awaited impatiently enough the hour for reading in that breviary of love-making, and was summoned; then the manœuvres of the litany began anew, nor did Blanche fail to sleep. This time, the said René rubbed his hand over the pretty leg, and ventured even to make sure if the polished knee, if any other thing, was soft as satin. At that sight, the poor boy, armed against his desire, so great was his fear, dared do only brief homage and caress lightly; and although he kissed, but softly, that beauteous spot, he held aloof. The which feeling, by the sensations of her mind and her body, the seneschale, who put force upon herself not to move, cried out:

"How now, René, I am asleep!"

Hearing what he deemed to be a stern reproof, the terrified page fled, leaving books, task, everything. Whereupon the seneschale added to the litanies this prayer:

"Blessed Virgin, how hard a task it is to make children!"

At dinner, the page was in dire alarm when he came to serve his lord and lady; but he marvelled greatly when he received from Blanche the most lascivious of all the glances that ever woman discharged, and a most grateful and potent glance it was, in that it transformed that child into a man of heart. So that, that same evening, Bruyn having tarried a brief time beyond his custom in his seneschal's court, the page sought and found Blanche asleep and caused her to dream a lovely dream. He removed that which so tormented her, and sowed so abundantly child-bearing seed, that, with the superfluity, she could have made two more. Whereupon the jade, seizing the page by the head and hugging him tight, exclaimed:

"O René, thou hast woke me!"

And, in very truth, never was sleep that could resist; and they discovered that the saints must sleep with clenched fists. Hereby, with no further mystery, and by virtue of a beneficent power which is the subservient privilege of wives, the soft and graceful plumage adapted to cuckolds was planted on the good husband's head, nor did he feel thereof the faintest shock.

After that joyous festival, the seneschale did with great zest take her siesta *à la Française,* while Bruyn took his *à la* Saracen. But, by dint of the said siestas, she learned how much sweeter was the flavor of the page's lusty youth than that of aged seneschals; and at night she buried herself in the bedclothes, far from her husband, who seemed to

her most devilishly rank and filthy. Then, by dint of sleeping and being awakened by day; by dint of taking siestas and saying litanies, the seneschale felt stirring within her charming body the fruit for which she so long and ardently had sighed; but now she loved yet more the planting than the germination.

Doubt not that René, too, knew how to read, no longer in books alone, but in the eyes of his sweet mistress, for whom he would have cast himself into the burning pile had such been her will. When goodly and abundant furrows had by them been made, above a hundred at the least reckoning, the little seneschale became thoughtful and anxious concerning her friend the page, his future and his soul. Now, of a rainy morning, when they were playing at *touche-fer*, like two children, innocent from head to foot, said Blanche, who was always caught:

"Hark ye, René! Dost know that, whereas I have committed only venial sins, because I was asleep, thou hast committed mortal sins?"

"Ah! madame," he made answer, "where, I pray thee, will God bestow all His damned souls, if that be sinning?"

Blanche laughed with great heart, and kissed him on the brow.

"Hush, naughty one, paradise is involved herein, and we must needs live there in company, if 'tis thy wish to be always with me."

"Oh! my paradise is here."

"Have done," said she. "You are a bad boy, a wicked boy, who have no thought for what I love:

that is you. Thou dost not know that I have a child, and that, a little hence, he will be no more hid than my nose. Now, what will the abbé say? What will monseigneur say? He may dispose of thee, if he flies into a passion. I counsel thee, little one, to go to the Abbé de Marmoustiers, to confess thy sins to him, and bid him take thought what best becomes thee to do respecting my seneschal."

"Alas!" said the crafty page, "if I sell the secret of our pleasures, he will place an interdict upon our love."

"Even so!" she said. "But your happiness in the other world is something that to me is so precious!"

"You wish it, then, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she replied, something feebly.

"Then will I go; but, sleep once more, that I may bid it adieu."

And the pretty couple recited litanies of adieu as if they had both foreseen that their love was destined to end in its April. Then, on the morrow, rather to save his dear lady than for himself, and to obey her withal, René de Jallanges bent his steps toward the great monastery.

HOW THE SAID SIN OF LOVE WAS BITTERLY REPENTED AND CAUSED GREAT MOURNING

"Just God!" cried the abbé, when the page had told the beads of his sweet sins, "thou art a partner in a monstrous felony, and hast been faithless to thy

lord! Know'st thou, misbegotten page, that for this thou wilt burn through all eternity, forever? And know'st thou that thou hast lost forever heaven above for a perishable and fleeting moment here below? Hapless youth! I see thee hurled forever into the pit of hell, unless thou payest to God, in this world, what thou owest Him for so heinous a sin."

Thereupon, the good old abbé, who was of the stuff of which saints are made, and who had great authority in the province of Touraine, terrified the young man by a mountain of arguments, Christian harangues, reminders of the commandments of the church, and as many eloquent things as a devil can say in six weeks to seduce a maid, but to such good purpose that René, who had the loyal fervor of innocence, made submission to the good abbé. Now, the said abbé, wishing to make a holy and virtuous man forever of this child now engaged in the path of wickedness, bade him go, first of all, and prostrate himself before his lord and confess to him his misbehavior; then, if he should escape safe and sound from that confession, to join the Crusaders forthwith and to go straight to the Holy Land, where he must remain fifteen full years to war against the infidels.

"Alas! reverend father," he said, in dire dismay, "will fifteen years be enough to pay my debt for so much of pleasure! Ah! if you but knew, there hath been enough bliss to pay for a thousand years!"

"God will be merciful. Go," replied the old abbé, "and sin no more. On this condition, *ego te absolvo*."

Poor René returned thereupon, with contrite heart, to the castle of La Roche-Corbon, and the first person whom he there encountered was the seneschal, who was overlooking the polishing of his arms, helmets, greaves, and the rest. He was seated on a great bench of marble, in the open air, and took huge delight seeing those splendid trappings glisten in the sun, which carried his mind back to his escapades in the Holy Land, the diverting frolics, the damsels, *et cætera*. When René fell on his knees before him, great was the nobleman's amazement.

"What means this?" he said.

"My lord," replied René, "bid these withdraw."

The which the servants having done, the page confessed his misdoing, relating how that he had attacked his lady during her sleep, and that he doubted not that he had gotten her with child, in imitation of the man with the saint, and came, by command of his confessor, to throw himself on the mercy of his outraged lord. Having spoken, René de Jallanges lowered his beautiful eyes, whence all the mischief proceeded, and remained modestly on his knees, without fear, his arms hanging by his sides, bareheaded, awaiting the evil hour and trusting in God. The seneschal was not so white that he could not turn whiter still; and, in truth, he became as pale as linen newly bleached, and was

dumb with wrath; then did this aged man, who had not in his veins enough of vital fluids to procreate a child, find in this moment of passion more strength than was required to destroy a man. With his hairy right hand he seized his heavy bludgeon, raised it, brandished it, and took aim with it so easily as that you would have said it was a skittle-ball, to let it fall upon the said René's pallid brow, who, knowing that he was most culpable in respect to his lord, remained calm and put forth his neck, thinking that he was about to pay the price of his love's guilt in this world and the next.

But his so blooming youth and all the natural fascinations of this bewitching crime found favor at the judgment-seat of the old man's heart, albeit Bruyn was stern, and, hurling his bludgeon at a dog which he frightened away, exclaimed:

"May a thousand millions of claws rend through all eternity the joints of her who made the man who planted the oak whereof the chair was made wherein thou hast made me cuckold! And may the same fate await them who engendered thee, accursed page of misfortune! Begone to the devil whence thou camest! Go from my sight, from the castle, from the country, nor tarry here one hair's-breadth more of time than there is need; else will I consign thee to death by a slow fire, which will make thee curse thy vile strumpet twenty times an hour!"

Having heard the first words of the seneschal, who had a reflux of youthful energy in blaspheming, the page fled; dispensing with the rest, and

did well. Bruyn, all aflame with evil passion, strode away to the gardens with all speed, cursing everything in his path, striking and swearing; he even overturned three earthen vessels held by a servant who was carrying food to the dogs; and he knew so little what he did that he would have killed a huckster for a comb. At last, he espied his deflowered one, gazing at the road to the convent, awaiting the page, nor knowing that she should never see him more.

"Ah! my lady, by the devil's triple prong, am I a gull and a child, think you, to believe that what has happened with the page would not have wakened you? Death! by my head! by my blood!"

"In sooth," she replied, seeing that the mine was exploded, "I did feel him most pleasantly; but, as you had not taught me the thing, I thought that 'twas a dream!"

The seneschal's angry wrath melted like snow in the sunshine, for the most violent anger of God himself would, at a smile from Blanche, have vanished.

"May a thousand millions of devils fly away with this stranger child. I swear that—"

"La la! swear not," said she. "If he be not yours, he is mine; and said you not the other night that you would love everything that came from me?"

Thereupon she poured forth a torrent of arguments, gilded words, lamentations, fault-findings, tears, and other women's *paternosters;* as, first of

all, that the estates would not revert to the king; that never had child been more innocently cast in its mould; that this and that, and a thousand things; so that the goodman was pacified; and Blanche, seizing a propitious moment, said:

"And where is the page?"

"He has gone to the devil!"

"What! you have killed him?"

She staggered, and turned pale.

Bruyn knew not which way to turn when he saw all the joy of his old age slipping from him; and he would fain, for his salvation, have produced the page. He bade his people seek him; but René had fled at full speed, fearing lest he should be altogether undone, and had set out for the countries over-sea, to the end that he might perform his vow. When Blanche had learned from the said abbé what penance was imposed upon her well-beloved, she fell into grievous melancholy, saying sometimes:

"Where is he, the poor, ill-fated youth, who is encompassed by perils for love of me?"

And she constantly asked for him like a child who gives its mother no rest until its prayer be granted. Upon these lamentations, the old seneschal, feeling himself at fault, strove to do a thousand things, one only excluded, to make Blanche happy; but nothing replaced the sweet endearments of the page.

One day, however, she bore the so long desired child! Be sure that that was a glorious day for the good cuckold; for, the likeness of the father being plainly engraved on the features of that pretty fruit

of love, Blanche was greatly comforted, and recovered somewhat of that merry humor and bloom of innocence whereby the seneschal's declining hours were made glad. By dint of watching the little one run about, by dint of watching the merry laughter passing between him and the countess, he came at last to love him, and would have been fierce in anger against one who should have cast doubt on his paternity.

Now, as the adventure of Blanche and her page had not transpired without the castle, it was said through all Touraine that Messire Bruyn had proved himself to be still capable of making a child. Unsullied, therefore, was Blanche's virtue, who, by the quintessence of knowledge by her derived from the natural reservoir of women, understood how necessary it was to hold her peace concerning the venial sin wherewith her child was tainted. So she became modest and prudent, and was cited as a model of virtue. Then she tested her goodman's kindness of heart, thinking to make use of it; and, without giving him license to go with her farther than the chin, forasmuch as she looked upon herself as René's property, Blanche, in return for the flowers of old age which Bruyn proffered her, fondled him, smiled upon him, kept him in joy, cajoling him with the pretty ways and wiles to which good women resort with the husbands whom they deceive, and to such good purpose that the seneschal wished not to die, straightened himself in his chair, and the longer he lived the more reconciled he became to life.

But one evening he died without knowing whither he was going, for he said to Blanche:

"How now, my love, I no longer see thee! Is it dark?"

It was the death of the just man, and well had he earned it as the reward of his labors in the Holy Land.

Blanche mourned long and deeply for his death, weeping for him as one weeps for a father. She remained in a state of melancholy, nor would give ear to the music of a second marriage; for which she was lauded by good people, who knew not that she had a spouse of the heart, a life in hope; but she was for the most part widowed in fact and widowed in heart, for that, having no news of her friend the Crusader, the poor countess deemed him dead; and on certain nights, seeing him lie wounded in a far country, she awoke bathed in tears. Thus lived she fourteen years in the memory of a single day of happiness. Finally, one day when she had with her certain ladies of Touraine, and they were chatting after dinner, lo! her little son, who was then about thirteen and a half and resembled René more than a child is allowed to resemble his father, and had naught of the defunct Bruyn save his name, came running from the garden, a pretty madcap like his mother, perspiring, breathless, catching and clinging to everything as he passed, following the manners and customs of childhood, and rushed straight upon his beloved mother, threw himself in her lap, and, cutting short the conversation, cried:

"Oh! mother, I have something to tell you. I saw in the courtyard a pilgrim who hugged me very tight."

"Zounds!" cried the châtelaine, turning to a servant whose duty it was to attend the young count and keep guard over his precious life, "I bade you never to allow a stranger's hand to rest upon my son, even though he were the holiest man in all the world. You will leave my service—"

"Alas! my lady," replied the old esquire, all aghast, "this man meant him no harm, for he wept while he kissed him most ardently."

"Wept he?" said she; "ah! 'tis the father."

Which having said, she rested her head on the chair wherein she sat, and which, you may be sure, was the chair wherein she had sinned.

Hearing this unforeseen declaration, the ladies marvelled so that, at first blush, they did not see that the poor seneschale was dead, nor was it ever known whether her sudden demise was caused by grief at her lover's departure, who, faithful to his vow, did not seek to see her, or by exceeding joy in his return and in the hope of obtaining the removal of the interdict which the Abbé de Marmoustier had imposed upon their loves. And there was great sorrow in the land: for Sire de Jallanges lost heart at the spectacle of the lady's burial, and became a monk at Marmoustier, which, in those days, was by some person called Maimoustier, as who should say *maius monasterium*, the greater monastery, and in very truth it was the noblest convent in all France.

THE KING'S SWEETHEART

There was in those days a goldsmith dwelling at the forges of Pont au Change, whose daughter was cited in Paris for her very great beauty, and renowned, more than all else, for her grace; wherefore doubt not that many pursued her by the usual methods of love; and, indeed, some would fain have given money to the father to have his said daughter for lawful wife, the which made him more content than I can say.

A neighbor, an advocate before the parliament, who, by dint of selling his loquacity to others, had as many estates as a dog has fleas, was pleased to offer the said father a fine house in acknowledgment of his consent to this marriage, whereinto he wished to enter. Which bait the goldsmith failed not to take. He gave his daughter, heedless of the fact that this furred hood had the look of a monkey, few teeth in his jaws, and those few loose, and without even smelling him, though he was filthy and stinking like all pettifoggers who crouch in the dung-heaps of the Palais de Justice, parchments, *olim*, and shady lawsuits.

Now when the fair maiden saw him, she straightway cried:

"God ha' mercy! I'll none of him."

"That is my affair!" said the jeweller, who had already become enamored of the fine house. "I give him to thee for thy spouse. Tune your fiddles. 'Tis his affair now, and his business to please thee."

"Is it so?" she replied. "Very good; before obeying you, I will tell him the truth."

Accordingly, that same evening, after supper, when the lover began ardently to plead his cause, declaring how that he was mad with love of her, and promising her great abundance for the remainder of her life, she sharply made answer:

"My father hath sold you my body; but, an you take it, you will make a strumpet of me, for rather would I belong to the first comer than to you. I pledge to you, contrary to the wont of young ladies, a disloyalty that will end only with death, your death or mine."

With that she set to weeping, as all maids do who are not yet skilled; for thereafter they no longer weep with the eyes. The honest advocate took these strange antics for the lures and baits young women use to make the flame burn brighter, and to turn the thoughts of their suitors to dowries, marriage-contracts, and other rights of a wife; so that the knave paid no heed, but laughed at the fair damsel's humors, saying:

"When shall the wedding be?"

"Even to-morrow," said she, "for that, the sooner it shall be, the sooner shall I be free to have lovers and to lead the joyous life of them who love as they choose."

Thereupon, the hare-brained advocate, caught like a lark in a child's snare, takes his leave, makes his preparations, enters his name at the Palais, trots to the ecclesiastical authority, purchases dispensations, and conducts this suit more rapidly than all his other causes, dreaming of naught save the maiden fair.

Meanwhile, the king, just returned from a journey, hearing no talk at his court of aught save the damsel who had refused a thousand crowns from this one, flouted that one, in brief, would be subdued by none, and rebuffed all the comeliest youths who would e'en have sacrificed to God their share in paradise to the sole end of enjoying that dragon for a single day; wherefore the good king, who was keen for such game, issued forth into the city, went to the forges by the bridge, entered the goldsmith's shop on the pretext of purchasing jewels for the lady of his heart, but *item* to bargain for the most precious jewel in the stock. The king was not in the humor for jewels, or the jewels were not to the king's taste, so long the goodman fumbled in a secret drawer to show the king a great white diamond.

"Sweetheart," said he then to the fair maid, while the father had his nose in the drawer, "you are not made to sell precious stones, but to receive them; and if you should give me the choice of all these jewels, I know one upon which everybody dotes, which pleases me, of which I should ever be subject or slave, and whose value the kingdom of France could never pay."

"Ah! sire," the fair maid replied, "I am to marry to-morrow. But, if you give me the dagger at your girdle, I will defend my maidenhead and reserve it for you, to obey the Gospel, wherein is written: 'Render unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's.'"

Straightway the king gave her the little dagger; and at this valiant response was so enamored of the girl as to lose his appetite. He took his departure, with the purpose to lodge his new love on Rue de l'Hirundelle in a palace belonging to him.

Behold my advocate in hot haste to be bridled, who, to the great discomfiture of his rivals, leads his bride to the altar to the clang of bells, with music, gives a feast fit to cause diarrhœa, and at night, after the dancing, comes to the chamber in his house where the fair maid should be in bed; a fair maid no longer, but a quarrelsome elf, a fierce she-devil, who, seated in her chair, would not enter the advocate's bed, but remained before the fire, warming her wrath and her thighs. The worthy husband, marvelling greatly, bent his knee before her, challenging her to the first passage at arms of the pretty battle of love; but she said not a word; and when he would have raised her skirt, simply to have a glimpse of what cost him so dear, she dealt him a buffet fit to break his bones and remained mute. This game did not displease our worthy advocate, who thought that he could see the end of it, in the way that you know; and he played in full confidence, inviting many a buffet by his cunning.

But, by dint of screeching, and twisting, and attacking again and again, he tore away a sleeve, then tore a petticoat, and put his hand on the dainty object of his fishing; an offence whereat the girl inveighed bitterly, springing to her feet; then, drawing the king's dagger, cried:

"What do you want with me?"

"I want everything!" he exclaimed.

"Ha! I should be a great strumpet to give myself against my inclination. If you thought to find my virginity undefended, you are much in error. This is the king's dagger, with which I will kill you, if you take a step toward me."

This said, she took a brand, having her eye always on the attorney, and drew a circle on the floor, adding:

"Here be the boundaries of the king's domain. Overstep them not; else will I not miss my aim."

The advocate, who had not thought of making love to that dagger, was altogether disconcerted, but even as he listened to this cruel decree whereof he had already paid the costs, the poor husband saw, through the rents, so fine a specimen of firm flesh, white and smooth, such a dazzling lining stopping the holes in the dress, *et cætera*, that it seemed to him that death would be sweet, had he but one little taste thereof; whereupon he rushed into the king's domain, crying:

"Little care I for death!"

And in truth threw himself upon her so suddenly that the fair maid fell heavily on the bed; but, not

losing her senses, defended herself so briskly that the advocate could do no more than touch the hair of the beast; even so he earned a dagger-thrust which cut a good bit of fat from his back, without inflicting too severe a wound: wherefore it cost him none too dear to have made a descent upon the king's estates.

But, intoxicated by this meagre triumph, he cried:

"I cannot live if I have not this lovely body and these marvels of love! So, kill me!"

And again attacked the royal preserve. The fair maid, who had her king on the brain, was unmoved by this great love, and said cruelly:

"If you threaten that with your attack, it is not you but myself whom I will kill!"

And her glance was wild enough to terrify the poor man, who sat himself down, bewailing this evil hour, and passed the night, so joyous to those who love each other, in lamentations, implorations, interjections, and other promises: how she should be served; could squander all his wealth; eat from gold plate; how he would make of her, a simple *damoiselle*, a great lady, by buying seignorial estates; and finally how, if she would give him license to break a lance in honor of love, he would forego all claim upon her and lay down his life in whatever fashion she should choose.

But she, still of good heart, told him in the morning that she would give him license to die, and that was all the pleasure he could give her.

"I have not deceived you," said she. "Indeed, contrary to my promise, I give myself to the king,

sparing you the commerce with idlers, carters, and all comers, with which I threatened you."

Then, when the day had come, she arrayed herself in her nuptial skirts and fal-lals, and waited patiently till her worthy husband, of whom she would have none, left the house to look to a client's affair, then sallied forth into the city, seeking the king. But she walked not so far as a crossbow will carry, for the king had placed on the watch one of his retainers, who was prowling about the house; and straightway said to the bride, who was still padlocked:

"Seek you not the king?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Then am I your best friend," rejoined the shrewd and subtle courtier; "I ask your aid and protection even as to-day I proffer you mine."

Thereupon he told her what manner of man the king was; on what side he must be taken; that he raged wildly one day, the next said never a word; and how he was this and how he was that; that she would be well quartered, well supplied; but that she must hold the king in bondage; in fine, he prattled to such good purpose that he made a perfect strumpet of her before she entered the Hôtel de l'Hirundelle, wherein Madame d'Etampes lived afterward. The poor husband wept like a stag at bay, when he did not find his goodwife in his house, and fell into a chronic melancholy. His brethren put as much shame and mockery upon him as Saint-James received of honor in Compostella; but the cuckold did

so wither and dry up in his misery that the others ended by seeking to lighten it. These furred hoods, in a spirit of pettifoggery, decreed that the grief-stricken goodman was not a cuckold, considering that his wife had declined his challenge to the jousting; and had the planter of horns been any other than the king, they would have undertaken to dissolve the said marriage. But the husband was enamored unto death of the hussy; nevertheless, he left her to the king, trusting that some day he should have her all to himself, esteeming one night with her not too dearly bought by the shame of a whole lifetime. One must love, I swear, to reason so; and there be many fine gallants who would rail at this great love. But he thought always of her, neglecting his causes, his clients, his thieveries, and all else. He wandered through the Palais de Justice like a miser seeking a lost treasure; careworn, dreamy; to such a point, in truth, that one day he wet a counsellor's gown, thinking that he was against the wall where the advocates left their causes.

Meanwhile, his fair wife was loved night and morning by the king, who could not have enough of her, forasmuch as she had charming ways of her own in love, knowing as well how to kindle the fire as to put it out. To-day, flouting the king; to-morrow, coddling him; never the same, and possessed of more than a thousand caprices: withal very kind, playing with her lips as no other could do, of a merry humor and fertile in mad frolics and pretty pleasantries.

One Sieur de Bridoré slew himself for her, from spleen at being unable to obtain the favors of love, even though he offered her his estate of Bridoré in Touraine. But of those good old Tourainers who gave an estate for a merry bout with the lance, the race is at an end. This suicide saddened the fair lady: and forasmuch as her confessor imputed the death to her as a subject of blame, she swore an oath, in her own mind, that, although she was the king's sweetheart, she would, in the future, accept the estates and content the givers by stealth, to save her soul. Thus did she lay the foundation of that great fortune whereby she acquired great consideration throughout the city. But she did likewise prevent many noblemen from dying, tuning her lute so well and inventing such pretty fables that the king knew not how mightily she assisted to make his subjects happier. In truth, he was so blindly infatuated with her, that she could have made him believe that the ceiling was the floor, the which would have been more easy with him than with any other, for that, in his house on Rue de l'Hirundelle, the said king was never done with being in bed, so that he knew not the difference between floor and ceiling; toiling always, as he would see if that lovely tissue could be worn out; but he wore out none but himself, the dear man, seeing that he died as the result of love. Although she took care to give herself none but well-favored men, the most firmly established at court, and her favors were as rare as miracles, her enviers and rivals said that for

ten thousand crowns a simple gentleman might taste of the king's joy, the which was as false as false could be, seeing that, at the time of her quarrel with the said sire, when she was reproved by him therefor, she proudly made answer:

"I abominate, I curse, I consign to thirty thousand devils those who have put this lie in your mind! I have had not one who has not spent above thirty thousand crowns for me at the door."

The king, angered as he was, could not restrain a smile, and kept her a month more to put lying tongues to silence. But Mademoiselle de Pisseleu did not esteem herself *dame* and mistress until her rival should be ruined. Many would have been content to be so ruined, seeing that she was married by a young nobleman who was happy with her, such store she had of love and ardor, to sell to those women who sin by too great coldness.

To resume. One day, when the king's sweetheart was riding through the city in her litter, to purchase laces, tuckers, shoes, neckerchiefs, and other munitions of love, and was so lovely and in such fine array that anyone, especially the clerks, who had seen her, would have thought that they saw the heavens opening, lo! her excellent husband meets with her near the Croix du Trahoir. She, whose dainty foot protruded from the litter, quickly drew back her head as if she had seen an asp. She was a good woman, for some I have known who would have flaunted by, proud to affront their husbands, in contempt of their conjugal lordship.

"What is the matter?" asked Monsieur de Lannoy, who was in respectful attendance upon her.

"'Tis nothing," she said beneath her breath. "But yonder fellow is my husband. The poor man is sadly changed! Formerly, he resembled a monkey; but to-day, meseems he is the image of Job."

The pitiable advocate stood aghast, feeling his heart break at sight of that slender foot and of his dearly-beloved wife.

Hearing this, said Sire de Lannoy, like the true court wag:

"Is it right, because you are her husband, that you should prevent her from passing?"

At these words, she laughed aloud, and the excellent husband, instead of killing her manfully, wept when he heard that laughter which tortured his brain, heart, mind, and everything, so that he was near falling upon an old bourgeois who was busily reanimating his manhood at sight of the king's sweetheart. The sight of that sweet flower which he had had in the bud, but which was now in full bloom and fragrance, and that white form, in gorgeous attire, that fairy-like waist, all went to make the advocate more sick at heart and more mad for her than any words could tell. And one must needs have been drunk with love of a maid who denies you, to understand to the full that man's frenzy. In sooth, it rarely happens that a man is consumed with so hot a fire as he then was. He swore that life, fortune, everything might vanish, but that he

would, for one time at least, be flesh to flesh with her and would make so bountiful a feast of love, that, mayhap, he would leave his entrails and his loins behind. He passed the night, exclaiming: "Ah! yes, I will have her! Curse me! Great God! I am her husband! Damnation!" beating his brow, and unable to remain in one place.

There are in this world chance occurrences in which narrow-minded people place no credence, because the said occurrences seem supernatural; but men of lofty imagination hold them for true, because no one could invent them. Thus it happened to the poor advocate on the very morrow of that cruel vigil when he had so deluded his love with vain hopes. One of his clients, a man of great name and who had access to the king at his pleasure, came early in the morning to say to the worthy husband that he must have a large sum of money, *videlicet*, twelve thousand crowns, without delay. To which the fur-hooded fox made answer that twelve thousand crowns were not found on every bush, and that, beyond sureties and guarantees of the interest, he must find a man who had in his house twelve thousand crowns without raising a finger, and that of such men there were few in Paris, great city as it was, and other such folderol as pettifoggers deal in.

"Prithee, monseigneur, have you a creditor who is overly grasping and extortionate?" he said.

"In sooth, yes," was the reply, "for 'tis an affair with the king's sweetheart! Breathe not a

word; but this night, by favor of twenty thousand crowns and my estate in Brie, I shall take her measure."

Thereat the advocate turned pale, and the courtier saw that he had stepped on something. As he was just returned from the war, he knew not that the king's beloved had a husband.

"You are pale?" he said.

"I have the fever," the pettifogger replied. "But," he continued, "is it to her that you give title-deeds and money?"

"Even so!"

"And who makes the bargain? is that also she?"

"No," said the client, "but these minor arrangements and weighty trifles are managed by a tire-woman who is surely the most adroit lady's-maid that ever was! She is sharper than mustard, and some profit clings to her fingers from these nights stolen from the king."

"I know a Jew," replied the advocate, "who can supply your need; but nothing will come of it, nor will you have one red *liard* of the twelve thousand crowns, unless the said lady's-maid come hither to receive the price of this thing which is so great an alchemist! It turns the blood to gold, *vrai Dieu!*"

"Oh! that will be a clever trick, if you force her to sign a quittance," rejoined the nobleman, laughing.

The tire-woman failed not to keep the appointment with the crowns at the advocate's who had

begged his client to bring her thither. And doubt not that the lordly ducats were well and duly spread out like nuns going to Vespers, lying on a table, and would have smoothed the wrinkles from the brow of an ass about to be beaten, so beauteous and gleaming were the gallant, noble young piles! The worthy advocate had not made ready that spectacle for asses. And the little hand-maiden licked her lips longingly, saying a thousand monkeyish paternosters to the said crowns. Which seeing, the husband whispered in her ear these words, which sweated gold:

"This is all yours!"

"Ah!" said she, "never have I been paid so well!"

"My love," the dear man rejoined, "you shall have them without being tormented with me." And, turning her partly round, added: "Hath not your client told you what my name is, eh? No! Learn, then, that I am the lawful husband of the lady whom the king hath seduced from her duties, and whom you serve. Take him these crowns and return to me here; I will count out yours to you on a condition which will be to your taste."

The terrified servant took courage, and was most curious to know how she should earn twelve thousand crowns and be not touched by the advocate; so she failed not to return forthwith.

"Now, my love," said the husband, "here be twelve thousand crowns; but with twelve thousand crowns one can buy estates, men, women, and the consciences of three priests at the least reckoning;

so that I believe that for these twelve thousand crowns I can possess you, body, soul, hypochondriac muscles and all. And I shall have faith in you, of the lawyer's sort: give and take. I desire that you go straightway to the lord who thinks to be loved by my wife this night, and that you cozen him by telling him that the king is to sup with her, and that, for this evening, he must content his fancy otherwise. Then, when that is done, I will take the place of that fine fellow and of the king."

"But how?" she asked.

"Oh!" he replied, "I have bought you and your machinations. But you will not look twice at the crowns without devising a way for me to have my wife; for in this matter you do no manner of wrong! Is it not a pious work to bring about the blessed reunion of a husband and wife whose hands have been placed in each other's before the priest?"

"By my *ficque!* come," she said. "After supper, the lights will be put out, and you can have your fill of my lady, provided that you do not say a word. Luckily, in those blissful moments, she shrieks more than she speaks, and questions only by gestures, for she hath much modesty and likes not to hold wanton converse as the court ladies do."

"Oh!" said the advocate, "take the twelve thousand crowns, and I promise you twice as much, if I enjoy by fraud the goods which belong to me of right."

Thereupon they agreed upon the hour, the door, the signal, everything; and the lady's-maid went

her way, carrying on mule-back and with a strong escort the shining gold pieces extorted one by one by chicane from widows and orphans and from others, too, all of which went into the little crucible wherein everything is melted, even our lives which come from thence. Now behold monsieur l'avocat shaving, perfuming himself, donning his fine linen, abstaining from onions to make his breath sweet, curling his hair, plucking up his courage, and doing all that a sorry knave from the Palais can invent to put himself in the guise of a lordly gallant. He assumes the airs of a young rake, essays to be sprightly, and tries to disguise his revolting face; but 'twas all in vain, he smelt still of the advocate. He was not so crafty as the fair laundress of Portillon, who, one Sunday, wishing to appear at her best for her lover, washed herself in lye, and still finding her ablutions did not succeed in satisfying her critical sense of smell, she decided on using a rinse of *eau bleu.*

And, thereupon, without loss of time, she stationed at the ford her rustic *cripsimen*, which prevented further trouble. But our pettifogger deemed himself the finest fellow in the world, albeit for all his drugs he was the loathsomest. To be brief, he dressed himself lightly, although the cold pinched like a hempen collar, and set forth, making all haste to the said Rue de l'Hirundelle. He cooled his heels there for a goodly space. But just as he concluded that he had been made a fool of, when it grew dark, the tire-woman came and opened the door to him, and

the worthy husband glided joyously into the king's palace. The tire-woman concealed him with care in a closet near the bed wherein his said wife lay, and through the cracks he saw her in all her beauty, for that she was laying off her clothes and warming at the fire a fighting costume through which everything could be seen. Now, believing herself to be alone with her tire-woman, she said the foolish things which women say at their toilet.

"Am I not worth full twenty thousand crowns to-night? And these, will not a castle in Brie be worthily expended for them?"

As she spoke, she slightly raised two outworks, hard as bastions, which could endure many assaults, seeing that they had been fiercely attacked without being weakened.

"My shoulders alone are well worth a kingdom!" she said. "I challenge the king to produce their like. But, God ha' mercy, I begin to weary of this trade. In toiling always, there is no pleasure."

The maid smiled, and her fair mistress said to her:

"I would like well to see you in my place."

Whereat the maid laughed the louder, and replied:

"Hush, mademoiselle. He is here."

"Who?"

"Your husband."

"Which?"

"The real one."

"Hush!" said the mistress.

And her tire-woman told her the adventure, wishful to retain her mistress's favor and the twelve thousand crowns as well.

"Ah! well, he shall have his money's worth," said the lawyer's wife. "I will let him get well chilled. If he hath taste of me, may I lose my beauty and become as ugly as a *cistre's* brat! Do thou bestow thyself in the bed in my place, and thou shalt earn thy twelve thousand crowns. Go and say to him that he must steal away early in the morning, that I may not detect thy cozening, and, a little before dawn, I will come and lie at his side."

The poor husband was shivering, and his teeth chattered noisily. The tire-woman returned to him on the pretext of fetching sheets, and said to him:

"Keep yourself warm in your desire. Madame is in a most exacting humor to-night, and you will be well served. But work lustily without making any other sound, else I am undone."

At last, when the goodman was congealed in every part, the candles were put out, the tire-woman whispered to the king's sweetheart through the curtains that the lord was there; then she crept into the bed and her mistress left the room as she had been the maid. The advocate came from his frigid hiding-place and crept eagerly between the sheets, thinking to himself:

"Ah! how good this is!"

In truth, the tire-woman gave him more than the worth of a hundred thousand crowns. And the goodman learned the difference between the

profusion of royal palaces and the paltry outlay of the bourgeois. The servant, who laughed like a madwoman, acquitted herself of her rôle to admiration, regaling the pettifogger with pretty little shrieks, contortions, convulsive leaps and bounds, like a carp on the straw, and emitting *Ha! has!* which dispensed her from other words. And so many were the requests proffered by her, and so abundantly did the advocate respond to them, that he fell asleep like an empty pocket; but, before having done, this lover, who wished to preserve a souvenir of that sweet night of love, plucked a hair from his wife under cover of her antics—from what part I know not, for that I was not there—and held in his hand that precious gauge of the fair creature's burning virtue. Toward dawn, when the cock crew, the king's sweetheart crept in beside her worthy husband and feigned to sleep. Then came the tirewoman and tapped softly on the goodman's brow, saying in his ear:

"'Tis time. Take your clothes and begone! The day is here."

The goodman, sorely grieved to leave his own treasure, must needs see the source of his vanished happiness.

"Oho!" he exclaimed, as he proceeded to compare the documents, "this that I have is fair, and see, this is black."

"What have you done?" said the maid. "Madame will see that she lacks her full number."

"Yes, but see."

"Bah!" said she, with an air of contempt, "do not you, who know everything, know that what is uprooted dies and fades?"

Thereupon, she thrust him forth, and laughed uproariously with the artful jade her mistress. The adventure became known. The poor advocate, named Féron, died of chagrin, forasmuch as he was the only man who had not his wife, while she who, from this adventure, was called La Belle Féronnière, married, after leaving the king, a young noble, the Comte de Buzançois.

And, in her declining days, she would tell of this shrewd trick, and would laugh in the telling, for she had never smelt the odor of the pettifogger.

This teaches us not to set more store than we ought by women who refuse to wear our yoke.

THE DEVIL'S HEIR

Once upon a time, there was a good old canon of Notre-Dame de Paris, who dwelt in a fine house of his own near Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs in the Parvis. This canon had come to Paris a simple priest, naked as a dagger, less its sheath. But, forasmuch as he was a comely man, well furnished in all respects, and so richly endowed by nature that, if need were, he could do the work of several without over-exhaustion, he devoted himself most earnestly to female confession: bestowing on the melancholy a consoling absolution; on the sickly a drachm of his balsam; on one and all some little sweetmeat. He was so well known for his discretion, his beneficence, and other ecclesiastical qualities, that he had penitents at court. And, in order not to rouse the jealousy of officialdom, of husbands and others, in a word, to endue these pleasant and profitable courses with a cloak of sanctity, the good lady of Maréchal Desquerdes gave him a bone of Saint Victor, by virtue of which bone all of the canon's miracles were wrought. And to the curious this answer was made:

"He hath a bone which cures everything."

And to this none had aught to say, for that it was not becoming to suspect the efficacy of relics. In

the shadow of his cassock, the worthy priest had the best of reputations, that of a valiant man under arms. Thus he lived like a king: coining money with his sprinkler, and turning holy water into good wine. Moreover, he lay among all the *et cæteras* of the notaries in testaments or in *caudiciles*, which some have written *codicils*, without warrant, since the word is derived from *cauda*,—tail,—as if you should say the tail of the legacy. In truth, the honest monk would have been made an archbishop, had he but said in jest: "I would like well to wear a mitre for a headpiece, to keep my head warmer." —But, of all the benefices proffered to him, he chose only a simple canonry, in order to retain the rich avails of his confessions. But one day the gallant canon found himself weak in the loins, for he was full sixty-eight years of age; and in truth had worn out many confessionals. Thereupon, recalling all his good works, he thought that he might cease his apostolic labors, more especially as he possessed about a hundred thousand crowns, earned by the sweat of his body. Thenceforth he confessed none but women of high lineage, and did it very well. So that it was said at court that, despite the efforts of the lustiest young clerks, no one but the canon of Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs could fitly cleanse the soul of a woman of condition. But at last the canon became, in due course of nature, a fine old nonagenarian, very snowy as to the head; with trembling hands, but firm as a tower; having spat so much without coughing that he coughed thenceforth but

could not spit; no longer rising from his chair, who had so often risen from it for humanity's sake; but drinking deep, eating heartily, saying naught, and having all the appearance of a living canon of Notre-Dame. In view of the said canon's immobility, in view of the tales of the wickedness of his life, which for a little time had circulated among the ever-ignorant common people; in view of his silent seclusion, his exuberant health, his youthful old age, and other things too long to tell, there were some people who, to rouse wonder and to injure our holy religion, went to and fro saying that the real canon was long since deceased, and that for above fifty years the devil had dwelt in the body of the said canon. In truth, it seemed to his former penitents that the devil alone could, by his exceeding warmth, have supplied the hermetic distillations which they remembered having obtained, in obedience to their desires, from the good confessor who always had the devil in him. But as this devil was properly cooked and undone by them, so that even for a queen of twenty years he would not have stirred, the shrewd minds and they who lacked not sense, or the bourgeois who argued concerning everything, fellows who would find lice on bald heads, asked why the devil always retained the form of a canon, went to Notre-Dame at the hours when canons go thither, and ventured so far as to inhale the fumes of the incense, taste the holy water, and a thousand other things!

To these heretical suggestions some made answer

that the devil wished no doubt to be converted, and others that he remained in the guise of a canon in order to mock at the three nephews and heirs of the said gallant confessor and to make them wait, even unto the day of their own demise, for the goodly succession of this uncle to whose abode they betook themselves every day, to see if the goodman's eyes were still open; and in truth found him always with an eye as clear and bright and gleaming as a basilisk's, the which pleased them mightily, for they loved their uncle very dearly—in words. In this regard, an old woman declared that of a surety the canon was the devil, for that two of his nephews, the attorney and the captain, leading their uncle by night, without torch or lantern, returning from a supper at the penitentiary's, had, through inadvertence, caused him to stumble over a huge pile of stones collected for building the statue of Saint Christopher. At first, the old man fell with a crash, then, amid the shouts of his dear nephews and by the light of the torches which they came to her house to fetch, was he found on his feet, straight as a ninepin and merry as a grig, saying that the penitentiary's good wine had given him courage to endure the shock, and that his bones were very hard and had withstood ruder assaults. His worthy nephews, believing him dead, were much amazed, and saw that time would have no easy task to crush their uncle since the stones had failed to accomplish it. Wherefore they did not call him their good uncle without reason, seeing that he was of good quality. Some

evil tongues said that the canon had found so many of these stones in his path that he remained at home in order not to be ill with the stone,—*pierre*,—and that the fear of the worst—*pire*—was the cause of his seclusion.

From all these tales and rumors it appears that the old canon, devil or not, remained in his house, refused to die, and had three heirs with whom he lived as with his sciatics, his weakness of the loins, and other ills of human life. Of the said three heirs, one was the vilest swashbuckler that ever issued from a woman's womb, and he must have torn his mother sadly when he broke his shell, seeing that he came forth from thence with teeth and hair all grown. So he spent in both tenses of the verb, present and future; having wenches of his own with whom he paid for his headgear; resembling his uncle in the endurance, power, and constant usage of that which is often on service. In great battles, he sought to give blows without receiving them, which is and always will be the only problem to solve in war; but he never spared himself; and as he had no other virtue than his valor, he was captain of a company of free-lances and much loved by the Duc de Bourgogne, who gave little thought to what his troopers did elsewhere. This nephew of the devil was called Captain Cochegrue; and his creditors, with the dullards, bourgeois, and others whose pockets he emptied, called him the *Mau-cinge*, since he was as wicked as cunning; but his back was spoiled by the natural infirmity of a hump, and

one could not with safety have pretended to mount upon it in order to see farther, for he would have run him through without question.

The second had studied the laws and customs of the realm, and, by his uncle's favor, had become an excellent attorney and pleaded at the Palais, where he managed the affairs of the ladies whom the canon had formerly the best confessed. He was *Pille-grue*, as a play upon his real name, which was Cochegrue, like the captain his brother's. Pille-grue had a meagre body, seemed to discharge very cold water, was pale of face, and possessed a countenance fashioned like a polecat's. This notwithstanding, he was worth many a *denier* more than the captain was worth, and bore his uncle a modicum of affection; but, for two years past, his heart had been a little cracked, and drop by drop his gratitude had oozed away; so that, from time to time, when the air was damp, he loved to put his feet in his uncle's shoes, and to press in advance the juice of that so desirable succession.

He and his brother the trooper deemed their share very light, for that in all loyalty, in law, in fact, in justice, in nature, and in reality, they must needs give the third part of the whole to a poor cousin, son of another sister of the canon, which cousin, who was lightly esteemed by the goodman, remained in the country where he was a shepherd near Nanterre. This keeper of flocks, a common peasant, came to the city by advice of his two cousins, who placed him in their uncle's house, in the hope that,

whether by his asininity, his clownish antics, his lack of intelligence, or his evil disposition, he would be displeasing to the canon, who would eject him from his testament. Poor Chiquon, then,—such was his name,—had been living alone with his old uncle about a month; and, finding more profit or more amusement in attending an abbé than in watching sheep, made himself the canon's dog, his slave, the staff of his old age, saying: "God preserve you!" when he broke wind; "God save you!" when he sneezed, and "God keep you!" when he belched; going to see if it rained or where the cat was; remaining dumb, listening, talking, receiving the goodman's coughing in his face, extolling him as the noblest canon in the world, and all most heartily, in all sincerity, not knowing that he was licking him after the manner of she-dogs cleaning their pups: and the uncle, who had not to learn on which side his bread was buttered, rebuffed poor Chiquon, made him twist and turn like a weathercock; always calling Chiquon, and always telling his other nephews that Chiquon helped him to die, such a dullard he was. Thereupon, hearing this, Chiquon strove to do well for his uncle and sharpened his understanding, the better to serve him; but as his hindquarters were shaped like a pair of pumpkins, as he was broad-shouldered, large-boned, far from active, he resembled old Silenus rather than an agile zephyr. In truth, the poor shepherd, simple man, could not remould himself; so he remained short and fat, awaiting his inheritance ere growing thin.

One evening, Monsieur le Chanoine was holding forth concerning the devil and the cruel agonies, punishments, tortures, etc., which God had in store for the damned; and honest Chiquon, listening, opened his eyes as wide as the maw of an oven at these words, without believing aught of them.

"Tell me," said the canon, "art thou not a Christian?"

"Zounds! yes," answered Chiquon.

"Then there is a paradise for the good; must there not be a hell for the wicked?"

"True, Monsieur le Chanoine, but the devil is of no use. If you had in this house a knave who turned everything topsy-turvy for you, would you not turn him out-of-doors?"

"Yes, Chiquon."

"Very good, monsieur my uncle. God would be a great fool to leave in this world which He hath built in such curious fashion, an abominable devil intent above all else on spoiling everything. Bah! I admit no devil if there is a good God. Rely on that. I would like right well to see the devil! Ha! ha! I have no fear of his claws."

"Ah! if I had thy faith, I should have no anxiety concerning my young days when I heard confession full ten times each day."

"Confess again, Monsieur le Chanoine! I promise you it will be accounted a priceless merit on high."

"La la! is it true?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chanoine."

"Dost thou not tremble, Chiquon, to deny the devil?"

"I care no more for him than for a sheaf of straw."

"Thou wilt suffer hereafter for this doctrine."

"Not so! God will defend me from the devil, for that I deem Him more learned and less foolish than the scholars do."

Thereupon, the other two nephews entered, and, recognizing from the canon's voice that he bore no great hatred to Chiquon, and that the complaints he made concerning him were veritable tricks to disguise the affection that he bore him, they looked at each other much astonished.

Then, seeing their uncle on the verge of laughter, they said to him:

"If you should make a will, to whom would you leave the house?"

"To Chiquon."

"And the manor on Rue Saint-Denis?"

"To Chiquon."

"And the fief at Ville-Parisis?"

"To Chiquon."

"Why, then," said the captain in his hoarse voice, "everything will be Chiquon's."

"No," replied the canon, and smiled; "for to no purpose shall I make my will, in due form; my inheritance will fall to the shrewdest of you three. I am so near to the future that I can clearly see your destinies therein."

And the crafty canon cast at Chiquon a mischief-laden glance such as a strumpet might cast at a

dandy to lure him into her den. The fire from that flashing eye enlightened the shepherd, and thenceforth the mists were cleared away from his understanding and his ears, and his brain was as open as a virgin on the morrow of her nuptials. The attorney and the captain, taking these sayings for prophecies out of the Gospel, made their reverences and left the house, all puzzled at the canon's foolish projects.

"What think'st thou of Chiquon?" said Pillegrue to Mau-cinge.

"I think, I think," grumbled the swashbuckler, "that I think of lying in ambush on Rue de Hierusalem, to put his head between his feet. He may stick it on again, if it seems good to him."

"Oh! oh!" said the attorney, "thou hast a fashion of dealing a wound which would be recognized, and people would say: 'Twas Cochegrue.' Now I thought to invite him to a dinner, after which we would play at tying ourselves in a bag, to see, as in the king's circle, which could walk best thus equipped. Then, having sewn him up, we would toss him into the Seine, begging him to swim."

"This requires to be well matured," said the trooper.

"Oh! 'tis all ripe," replied the advocate. "The cousin having gone to the devil, the succession will then be between us two."

"I wish it may be," said the soldier. "But we shall need to act together like two legs of the same body; for, if thou art fine as silk, I am strong as

steel; and daggers are worth quite as much as cords! Mark that, my worthy brother—"

"'Tis well!" said the advocate. "The cause has been tried; now, shall it be the cord or the steel?"

"*Ventre-de-Dieu!* is it a king whom we have to despatch? For a simple clod of a shepherd, need we so many words? Come! twenty thousand francs out of the inheritance to that one of us who shall first put an end to him! I will say to him with all my heart: 'Pick up thy head!'"

"And I: 'Swim, friend!'" cried the advocate, laughing like a slit in a doublet.

With that, they went to supper, the captain with his wench, the attorney with a goldsmith's wife, whose lover he was.

Who was thunderstruck? Chiquon! The poor shepherd heard the discourse touching his death, although his two cousins were walking in the *parvis* and talking as one talks in church when praying to God. So that Chiquon was much disturbed to know if the words ascended or his ears had descended.

"Do you hear, Monsieur le Chanoine?"

"Yes," he replied, "I hear the wood snapping in the fire."

"Oho!" rejoined Chiquon, "though I believe not in the devil, I believe in Saint-Michel, my guardian angel, and I fly whither he calls me."

"Go, my child," said the canon, "and beware lest thou get wet or lose thy head, for meseems I hear running water, and the vagabonds of the street are not always the most dangerous vagabonds."

At these words, Chiquon marvelled greatly, and, glancing at the canon, saw that his manner was most jovial, his eye most bright, and his feet most crooked; but, as he had to take measures regarding the death which threatened him, he reflected that he would always have time to admire the canon or to bite his nails, and he hastened away through the city like a woman ambling daintily toward her pleasure.

His two cousins, having no inkling of the divinatory faculty of which shepherds have many a transitory spasm, had oftentimes discussed their secret manœuvres before him, counting him for naught.

Now, one evening, for the canon's diversion, Pillegrue had described the demeanor in love of the wife of that goldsmith on whose head he had neatly placed a pair of horns, carved, burnished, engraved, and decorated like a prince's salt-cellars. The good lady was, according to him, a true model of merriment, bold in attack, giving an embrace while her husband was coming up the stairs, abashed at nothing; devouring the harvest as she would eat a strawberry, thinking of spoils; always toying, always fluttering; merry as a virtuous woman who lacks nothing; contenting her worthy husband who loved her as dearly as he might love his palate; delicate as a perfume; and for five years she had managed so well her household affairs and her amours that she had the name of a virtuous woman, her husband's confidence, the keys of the house, the purse and everything.

"And when, pray, do you play upon this sweet flute?" queried the canon.

"Every evening. And many times I lie with her."

"How can that be?" said the astonished canon.

"Thus. There is in an adjoining closet a great chest wherein I bestow myself. When her worthy husband returns from his gossip the draper's, where he goes to supper every night, for he often does duty with the draper's wife, my mistress feigns a slight indisposition, lets him go to bed alone, and comes to have her troubles cured in the room where the chest is. In the morning, when my goldsmith is at his forge, I take my leave; and as the house has one issue on the bridge and another on the street, I always come to the door where the husband is not, on the pretext of discussing his lawsuits, which I maintain in health and happiness, never letting them come to an end. It is cuckoldom with a revenue attached, for the petty expenses and lawful charges of the procedure cost as much as horses in a stable. He loves me much, as every good cuckold should love the man who helps him to dig, water, plough, and cultivate the natural garden of Venus, and he does naught without me."

Now, these evolutions recurred to the shepherd's memory, who was enlightened by a gleam arising from his peril, and counselled by the instinct of self-preservation, whereof every animal possesses a sufficient supply to reach to the end of the skein of his life. Chiquon, therefore, went with all speed to Rue de la Calandre, where the goldsmith was like to be at supper with his gossip, and, having knocked

at the door, and made answer through the little wicket that he was a messenger of State secrets, was admitted to the draper's house. Whereon, coming straight to the fact, he bade the merry goldsmith rise from the table, led him to a corner of the room, and said:

"If one of your neighbors should plant a horn on your brow, and was delivered into your hands, bound hand and foot, would you not toss him into the water?"

"That would I," said the goldsmith, "but if you make sport of me, I will pummel you well."

"La la!" said Chiquon, "I am your friend, and come to warn you that, as many times as you have foregathered with the draper's wife, so many times has your goodwife done the same with Pille-grue the advocate; and if you return to your forge, you will find a good fire there. At your coming, he who neatly sweeps out the thing you know, to keep it clean, will hide in the great clothes-chest. Do you pretend that I have bought the said chest and I will be on the bridge with a wagon, at your orders."

The said goldsmith took his cloak and cap, parted company with his gossip without a word, and ran to his hole like a poisoned rat. He arrives and knocks; the door is opened, he enters, hurries up the stairs, finds two covers laid, hears the chest close, sees his wife coming from the chamber of love, and says to her:

"My love, here be two covers."

"Even so, my dear, are there not two of us?"

"No," said he, "there be three of us."

"Is your gossip coming?" she asked, looking straightway down the stairs with perfect innocence.

"No, I speak of the gossip who's in the chest."

"What chest?" said she. "Are you in your right mind? Where see you a chest? Do we put gossips in chests? Am I a woman to keep chests full of gossips? Since when have gossips lodged in chests? Are you mad with your prating about gossips and chests? I know of no gossip of yours save Master Corneille the draper, and no chest save that in which our clothes are."

"Oh!" said the goldsmith. "My good wife, there's an evil-tongued youth who hath come to warn me that thou dost allow thyself to be paired with an advocate, and that he is in thy chest."

"I!" she exclaimed, "why I could never endure those pettifoggers, they do everything awry."

"La la! my love," said the goldsmith, "I know thee for a good woman and will have no quarrel with thee for a paltry chest. The fellow who gave me the warning is a boxmaker, to whom I propose to sell the cursed chest, which I no longer wish to see in the house; and he will sell me for it two pretty little ones, wherein there will be no room for so much as a child: thus will the slanders and idle talk of those who are envious of thy virtue die for want of food."

"You give me much pleasure," said she; "I care naught for my chest, and, as it happens, there is

nothing in it. Our linen is at the laundry. 'Twill be an easy matter to carry the mischief-making chest away to-morrow. Will you sup?"

"*Nenni!*" he replied, "I shall sup with better appetite without the chest."

"I see," said she, "that 'twill be easier to take the chest from here than from your head—"

"Holà!" cried the goldsmith to his smiths and apprentices. "Come down."

In a twinkling, his people were on their feet. Then, the master having curtly ordered the removal of the chest, that accomplice of love was suddenly borne through the room; but, on the passage, the advocate, finding his feet in the air, to which he was not accustomed, moved a little.

"Go on," said the woman, "go on! 'tis the joints cracking."

"No, my love, 'tis the bolt."

And, without further parley, the chest slid very prettily down the stairs.

"Ho there! the wagon!" shouted the goldsmith.

And Chiquon came, whistling to his mules, and the trusty apprentices hoisted the litigious chest on the wagon.

"Hi! hi!" cried the advocate.

"Master, the chest speaks," said an apprentice.

"In what tongue?" said the goldsmith, administering a smart kick between two parts that luckily were not of glass. The apprentice fell over a step, and discontinued his studies in chest-language. The shepherd, accompanied by the worthy goldsmith,

carted the whole baggage to the water's edge, paying no heed to the shrill eloquence of the talking wood; and, having added some stones thereto, the goldsmith tossed it into the Seine.

"*Swim, my friend!*" cried the shepherd in a mocking voice, just as the chest took water with a graceful little dive, like a duck.

Chiquon continued along the quay to Rue du Port Saint-Landry, near the cloisters of Notre-Dame. There he spied a house, recognized the door, and knocked loudly thereon.

"Open," he cried, "open in the king's name!"

Hearing which, an old man, who was no other than the famous usurer Versoris, hastened to the door.

"What seek you?" he asked.

"I am sent by the provost to warn you to keep good watch to-night," Chiquon replied, "even as he, for his part, will have his archers under arms. The humpback who robbed you has returned. Stand firm to your arms, for he might well relieve you of the rest."

With that, the worthy shepherd took to his heels and hastened to Rue des Marmouzets, to the house where Captain Cochegrue was feasting with La Pasquerette, the prettiest of wantons and the sweetest in iniquity of all those then living, according to all the *filles de joie*. Her glance was keen, piercing as a dagger-thrust. Her carriage was so seductive to the sight, that she would have set all paradise to rutting. In fine, she was as bold as

a woman who has no other virtue left save insolence. Poor Chiquon was sadly embarrassed as he went toward Rue des Marmouzets. He greatly feared that he might not discover the house of La Pasquerette, or might find the two doves in bed; but a good angel arranged matters especially to please him. In this wise. When he entered Rue des Marmouzets, he saw many lights at the windows, night-capped heads outside, and strumpets, harlots, housewives, husbands, and young women, all newly risen, gazing at one another as if a thief were being led to the gallows by torchlight.

"Ho there! what's the matter?" said the shepherd to a citizen, who had come to his door in hot haste, halberd in hand.

"Oh! nothing," the goodman replied. "We thought that the Armignacs had made a descent on the city; but 'tis only Mau-cinge beating La Pasquerette."

"Where?" queried the shepherd.

"Yonder, in that fine house, whose pillars have at the top the jaws of flying frogs daintily carved. Do you not hear the servants and maids?"

And, in very truth, naught could be heard but cries of "Murder! Help! Holà! Help!"

Then there was a rain of blows in the house; and Mau-cinge roared in his loud voice: "Death to the jade! Sing'st thou, hussy? Ah! thou wouldst have money? take it!"—And La Pasquerette groaned: "Oh! oh! I am dying! help! oh! oh!"—Then the heavy blow of a sword, and the heavy fall

of the girl's light body rang out, and were followed by a great silence; after which the lights went out; servants, maids, guests, and others returned to the house; and the shepherd, who had come most opportunely, mounted the stairs with them. But, seeing in the room the flagons shattered, the hangings torn, the cloth and dishes on the floor, all drew back.

The shepherd, bold as every man devoted to a single purpose, opened the door of the pretty room wherein La Pasquerette slept, and found her in a swoon, her hair dishevelled, her mouth distorted, lying on her blood-stained carpet; and Mau-cinge, in dire dismay, speaking very low, for he knew not on what note to sing the rest of his anthem:

"Come! my little Pasquerette, do not play at death! Come, I say, and let me make thee neat and trim once more. Ah! slyboots, living or dead, thou art so pretty in thy blood, that here's at thee!"

Whereupon the crafty trooper lifted her and threw her on the bed, but she fell there as straight and rigid as the body of one hanged. Seeing which her companion deemed it wise to take his hump out of the game; but, before taking his leave, the knave exclaimed:

"Poor Pasquerette! How could I have killed such a dear girl whom I loved so well! But yes, I have killed her, 'tis plain enough; for never in her lifetime did her pretty bosom hang down as now! *Vrai-Dieu!* one would say 'twas a gold piece in a wallet!"

Whereupon, La Pasquerette opened her eyes and bent her head slightly to look at her flesh, which

was white and firm; then she returned to life with a resounding buffet on the captain's cheek.

"That for slandering the dead!" she said, smiling.

"And why did he kill you, cousin?" queried the shepherd.

"Why? to-morrow the bailiffs are coming to seize everything here, and he who hath no more money than virtue reproved me for wishing to give pleasure to a pretty lordling, who would save me from the grasp of the law."

"Pasquerette, I will break thy bones!"

"La la!" said Chiquon, whom Mau-cinge recognized at that moment, "is it all for that? My good friend, I bring you great wealth."

"From whence?" queried the captain in great amazement.

"Come hither, that I may speak in your ear. If some thirty thousand crowns should walk abroad by night in the shadow of a pear-tree, would you not stoop to seize them, in order that they should not be lost?"

"Chiquon, I will kill thee like a dog if thou mock'st at me, or kiss thee where thou wilt, if thou dost bring me face to face with thirty thousand crowns, even though there were need to kill three bourgeois at the corner of a quay."

"You will not need to kill so much as a cap. This is the fact. I have for a friend, in all honesty, the maid-servant of the usurer who lives in the city, near our uncle's house. Now, I have learned, with certain knowledge, that the dear man set forth this

THE DEVIL'S HEIR

Whereupon, La Pasquerette opened her eyes and bent her head slightly to look at her flesh, which was white and firm; then she returned to life, with a resounding buffet on the captain's cheek.

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...resounding buffet on the captain's cheek.

"Thou'rt murdering the dead!" she said, smiling.

"And why did he kill you, cousin?" queried the shepherd.

"Why? to-morrow the bailiffs are coming to seize everything here, and he who hath no more money than virtue reproved me for wishing to give pleasure

grasp of the ...

"Prosperous ... break thy bones!"

"... who, Mau-cinge recog-

...bring you great wealth."

"... whence?" queried the captain in great

... if thou ... thou wilt, if ... with thirty thousand ... there were need to kill ... burgesses at the corner of a quay."

"You will not need to kill so many. This is the fact. I have for a friend ..., the maid-servant of the usurer who lives opposite, near our uncle's house. Now, I have learned, with certain knowledge, that the dear man ... his

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morning for the country, after burying beneath a pear-tree in his garden a full bushel of gold, thinking that he was seen by none but the angels. But the girl who, by chance, had a great toothache and was taking the air at her attic-window, spied the old extortioner without looking for him, and tattled to me for pure affection. If you will swear to give me a goodly share, I will lend you my shoulders to climb to the top of the wall, and, thence, into the pear-tree which is next the wall. Hein! now will you say that I'm a clown, a beast?"

"*Nenni!* thou art a most loyal cousin, an honest man; and if thou hast ever need to put an enemy in the shade, I am at hand, ready to slay even one of my friends for thee. I am thy cousin no longer, but thy brother.—Holà! my love!" cried Mau-cinge to La Pasquerette, "lay the tables anew; wipe away thy blood; it belongs to me and I will pay thee for it, aye, and give thee of mine a hundred times what I have taken of thine. Bring forth the best wine; hearten our frightened varlets; readjust thy skirts; laugh, I insist upon it; have an eye to the ragouts, and let us resume our evening prayers where we broke them off; to-morrow, I will make thee more splendid than the queen. This is my cousin whom I desire to feast, even if for that it should be necessary to throw the house out of the windows; we will find everything to-morrow again in the cellars. Fall on! have at the ham!"

Thereupon, and in less time than a priest takes to say his *Dominus vobiscum*, the whole dovecote

passed from tears to laughter, as it had passed from laughter to tears. It is only in these houses of pleasure that love is made thus by dagger-thrusts, and merry tempests blow between four walls; but these are things which strait-laced ladies do not understand. The said Captain Cochegrue was as light of heart as a hundred scholars dismissed from school, and plied his good cousin with drink, who swallowed everything like a rustic and played the drunken man, stammering a thousand foolish things: as that he would buy Paris on the morrow; would lend a hundred thousand crowns to the king; could wallow in gold; in fine, told so many absurd stories, that the captain, dreading some untimely disclosures and deeming Chiquon's brain to be completely fuddled, led him away, purposing, at the time of the division, to tap Chiquon, to see if he had not a sponge in his stomach, forasmuch as he had consumed a full cask of good Suresnes wine. They walked together, discoursing upon a thousand theological subjects which became sadly confused, and at last arrived, with stealthy step, at the wall of the garden where the usurer's crowns were. The said Cochegrue, making a platform of Chiquon's broad shoulders, jumped into the pear-tree like a man skilled in taking cities by assault; but Versoris, who was on the watch for him, dealt a blow at his neck and repeated it so energetically that, in three blows, the said Cochegrue's head fell, but not before he heard the shepherd's shrill voice crying to him:

"*Pick up thy head, my friend!*"

Thereupon, the generous Chiquon, in whose person virtue received its due reward, deemed it prudent to return to the good canon's house, whose inheritance was, by the favor of God, made exceedingly simple. So he hastened to Rue Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs at his topmost speed, and was soon sleeping like a new-born babe, no longer conscious of what the word cousin might mean. On the morrow rose he, as is the wont of shepherds, with the sun, and came to his uncle's chamber to inquire if his spittle was white, if he coughed, if he had slept well; but the old maid-servant told him that the canon, hearing the matin bell ring at Saint-Maurice, the first patron saint of Notre-Dame, had gone, in reverent spirit, to the cathedral, where all the chapter was to breakfast with the Bishop of Paris. To which Chiquon made answer:

"Hath Monsieur le Chanoine lost his wits to go forth thus early, to take cold in his head and in his feet? does he wish to die? I will light a great fire to make him comfortable on his return."

And the good shepherd went to the room where the canon commonly sat; but, to his great amazement, saw him seated in his chair.

"How now! what said that fool of a Buyrette? I knew you to be too wise to be perched at this hour in your stall in the choir."

The canon said not a word. The shepherd, who was, like all men of a contemplative turn, a man of concealed good sense, was not unaware that sometimes old men have strange manias, hold converse

with the essence of occult things, and mumble interiorly of subjects other than those under discussion; so, from a sentiment of reverence and with great respect for the secret meditations of the canon, he seated himself at a distance and awaited the end of this reverie, contemplating without a word the length of the old man's nails, which seemed disposed to make holes in his shoes. Then, as he gazed closely at his dear uncle's feet, he was aghast to see that the flesh of his legs was so scarlet that it reddened his hose and seemed all on fire through the meshes.

"So he is dead!" thought Chiquon.

At that moment, the door opened, and he saw the canon returning from service with his nose frozen.

"Oho! uncle," said Chiquon, "have you lost your wits? prithee, observe that you should not be at the door, for that you are already seated in your chair by the fire, and there cannot be two canons like you in the world!"

"Ah! Chiquon, time was when I should have liked right well to be in two places at the same time; but that is not in man's power; he would be too happy! Dost thou see double? There is no other here!"

Thereupon, Chiquon, turning his face toward the chair, saw that it was empty, and, much surprised, as you may imagine, drew near to it and spied on the floor a little heap of ashes whence arose an odor of sulphur.

"Ha!" said he, with effusion, "I see that the devil has borne himself in my regard like a gallant fellow; I will pray God for him."

And with that he artlessly told the canon how the devil had amused himself by playing Providence and had helped him to rid himself fairly of his wicked cousins; the which the worthy canon did much admire and well appreciate, for that he still had much good sense and had many times observed things to the credit of the devil. Whereon the good old priest said that there was always as much good to be found in evil as evil in good, and, in consequence, that one must take but little heed to the other life: the which was a grievous heresy which many a council hath chastised.

This is how the Chiquons became rich, and were able, in these days, with their ancestor's fortune, to assist in building Pont Saint-Michel, where the devil cuts a very pretty figure under the angel, in memory of this adventure set forth in truthful histories.

THE MERRY PRANKS OF KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH

King Louis the Eleventh was a jovial blade, loving right well to jest and make merry; and, aside from the interests of his kingdom and of religion, he feasted plenteously and gave chase to hooded damsels as freely as to hares and other royal game. Wherefore the witlings who have made him out a sly knave show plainly that they knew him not, seeing that he was a good friend, a good quibbler, and such a laugher as never was.

He it was who said, when he was in his merry humor, that four things are excellent and timely in life, to wit: to stool hot, to drink cold, to stand stiff, and to swallow soft. Some persons have abused him for having foregathered with low-lived jades. That is an infamous falsehood, since his love-children, of whom one was legitimized, were all born of great families and received handsome establishments. He dwelt not in outward show and profuse spending; put his hand on what was solid; and because, forsooth, some devourers of the people found no crumbs under his roof, they have all cried shame upon him. But the real gleaners of truths know that the said king was a good little man

in private, even most lovable; and before ordering his friends' heads cut off or punishing them, which he spared not to do, needs must they have been most disloyal to him; his vengeance was always justice. Only in our friend Verville have I seen the charge that that excellent monarch erred; but once is not a habit; and, indeed, the fault was more his gossip Tristan's than his, the king's, own. This is the fact as the said Verville hath told it, and I misdoubt that he intended a jest. I set it down, for that some persons do not know the exquisite work of my most excellent compatriot. I abridge it and give only the substance, the details being more full as scholars know.

"Louis XI. had given the abbey of Turpenay—of which there is mention in *Imperia*—to a gentleman who, while enjoying the revenues, caused himself to be called Monsieur de Turpenay. It came to pass that the king being at Plessis-lez-Tours, the veritable abbé, who was a monk, appeared before the king and made his petition to him, remonstrating that canonically and monastically he was invested with the abbey and that the gentleman usurper ousted him contrary to all right, and that in consequence thereof he prayed His Majesty that justice should be done him. The king, shaking his wig, promised to make him well content. This monk, importunate like all animals wearing hoods, came often at the king's leaving the table, who, wearying of the holy water of the convent, summoned his gossip Tristan and said to him: "Gossip, there

is one Turpenay here who doth annoy me; put him out of the world for me."—Tristan, taking a cowl for a monk or a monk for a cowl, came to this gentleman whom all the court called Monsieur de Turpenay; and, having accosted him, so managed that he led him aside, and made him understand that it was the king's will that he should die. He strove to resist, supplicating, and to supplicate, resisting, but there was no way to be heard. He was strangled with all delicacy between the head and shoulders, so that he died; and, three hours later, the king's gossip told him that he was distilled. After five days, which is the term at which souls return, it came to pass that the monk entered the room where the king was, who, seeing him, was greatly astonished. Tristan was present. The king beckoned him and said in his ear: "You did not do what I bade."—"An it please Your Majesty, I did it. Turpenay is dead."—"*He!* I meant this monk."—"I understood the gentleman!"—"What! then he is dead?"—"Even so, sire."—"'Tis well."—Turning to the monk: "Come hither, monk."—The monk draws near.—"To your knees," said the king.—The poor monk was afraid. But the king said: "Thank God who hath not willed that you should be hanged as I gave order. He who took your estate hath been hanged. God hath done you justice! Go and pray God for me, and budge not from your convent."

This proves the kind heart of Louis the Eleventh. He might very well have hanged the monk, because

of the error, for, as to the said gentleman, he died in the king's service.

In the early days of his dwelling at Plessis-lez-Tours, the said Louis, not wishing to have his breaking-bouts and his joyous debauches in his castle, from respect for her Majesty,—a kingly delicacy which his successors have not displayed,—fell in love with a lady named Nicole Beaupertuys, who was, if the truth be told, a bourgeoise of the town, whose husband he sent to Le Puiset, and placed the said Nicole in a house near the Chardonneret, in the neighborhood of Rue Quincampoix, for that it was a deserted spot, far from all habitations. Thus were the husband and wife devoted to him, and he had by La Beaupertuys a daughter who died a nun. This Nicole had a tongue as sharp as a parrot's, was of a charming corpulence, with two huge, generous, ample natural cushions, firm to the touch, white as angel's wings, and was known, moreover, to be fertile in peripatetic ways, wherefore it came to pass that never with her was the same thing repeated in love, so well had she studied the pleasant by-ways of the science, ways of seasoning the olives at Poissy, titillations of the nerves, and the secret doctrines of the breviary, all of which the king dearly loved. She was gay as a lark, always singing and laughing, not ever hurt among which is true of all women of this stamp and open nature, who have always an occupation.—Understand me as you choose!—The king went often with jovial companions, his friends, to the said house.

said, not to be seen, went thither by night, without escort. But as he was courteous and liberal and favourable, he gave to Nicole all the dogs in his kennels which were the most savage, and the means to eat a man without warning, which royal dogs know to their love Nicole and the king. When the six came, Nicole ordained them in the garden and the door of the tall house being shut close and amply barred, the king did not take the keys, and, in all security, entertained himself, with his friends, in pleasures of innumerable sorts, having no weapons, breaking a lance, playing balls, and showing pretty games. On these nights, gossip Nicole kept watch in that region, and whatever had ventured on the Mall du Chardonnet would have been wounded speedily placed in a position to give the conditions to peasantry with the lion, unless he had the king's pass, for Lions the Lowest were often in quest of wenches for the French or persons to divert him, by means of subtle pranks invented by Nicole or their guests. Thus at Tours were three sons for the king's petty pleasures, upon whom he mildly enjoined silence: so that these pastimes were not known until his demise. The term of these was put with the said invented by the said sire. I give it, even though it be not the subject of this tale, for that it reveals the comical and facetious nature of the worthy king.—There were at Tours three misers of renown. The first was Master Cornelius, who is sufficiently known. The second was named Picard, and sold gingerbread, coloured paper, and church ornaments. The third

was named Marchandeau, and was a very rich vine-grower. These last two Tourainers have produced honorable progeny, despite their villainies. One evening, when the king was with La Beaupertuys, in high humor, having drank freely, told droll stories, and paid his devotions before Vespers in madame's oratory, he said to his gossip Le Daim, Cardinal La Balue, and old Dunois, who were still riding their nags:

"We must have some sport, my friends!—Methinks 'twould be a sweetly comic thing to see a miser before a bag of gold, yet unable to touch it.—Holà!"

At the summons, a varlet appeared.

"Go to my treasurer," said the king, "and bid him bring hither six thousand golden crowns, and that soon. Then you will go and seize the bodies of my gossip Cornelius, old Marchandeau, and the jeweller on Rue du Cygne, and bring them hither, by order of the king."

Then they fell to drinking anew and to discussing gravely which was the better, a woman with a gamy flavor or one who soaps herself lavishly; one who is thin or one who is in good case; and as they were the flower of learning, they said that the best woman was she whom one had to one's self, like a dish of hot mullets, at the precise moment when God sent her a pleasant thought to communicate. The cardinal asked which was the most precious to a woman, the first kiss or the last. To which La Beaupertuys made answer that

the last was the most precious, seeing that she then knew what she lost, while at the first, she never knew what she had gained. Upon this and other discourse, which other hath, most unluckily, been lost, came the six thousand gold crowns which were worth full three hundred thousand francs of to-day, we do so deteriorate in everything. The king gave order that the crowns should be placed on a table and well lighted; where they gleamed like the eyes of the guests, which lighted up instinctively; whereat they laughed in their own despite. Nor had they to wait long for the three misers, whom the servant brought in, pale and breathless, save only Cornelius, who knew the king's fantastic humor.

"Now, my friends," said Louis, "look at the crowns on yonder table."

And the three bourgeois nibbled at them with their eyes; and be sure that La Beaupertuys's diamond gleamed less bright than their little fish-like eyes.

"'Tis all yours," said the king.

Whereupon they no longer gazed upon the crowns, but began to eye one another, and the guests were persuaded that old monkeys are more expert in grimaces than all others, for that their faces became exceeding curious, like those of cats drinking milk, or maidens itching with thoughts of marriage.

"Look you!" said the king, "all this shall belong to that one of you who shall say thrice to the two others: '*Baise mon cul!*' at the same time putting

his hand in the gold; but if he be not as grave of face as a fly that hath raped its neighbor, and if he smiles while making that gibe, then shall he pay ten crowns to madame. But he may have three trials."

"That will be soon earned!" said Cornelius, who, in his quality of Dutchman, kept his mouth closed and serious, no less than madame's case was open and laughing.

With that he gallantly put his hand upon the crowns to see if they were of good metal, and clutched them solemnly; but, as he looked toward the others, to say to them in all civility: "*Baisez mon cul!*" the two misers, fearing his Dutch gravity, replied: "At your pleasure!" as if he had sneezed; the which made all the guests to laugh and Cornelius himself.

When the vine-grower essayed to take the crowns, he felt such twitchings of his lips that his old skimmer-like face let laughter ooze through all its wrinkles, so that you would have said 'twas issuing from the cracks of a chimney; and could say naught. Then came the jeweller's turn, who was a little mite of a sneering fellow, and whose lips were contracted like the neck of a man hanged. He grasped a handful of crowns, looked at the others, even the king himself, and said, with a mocking air:

"*Baisez mon cul!*"

"Is it dirty?" queried the vine-grower.

"You may look and see," retorted the jeweller gravely.

Thereupon the king feared for his crowns, seeing that the said Peccard repeated the words without laughing, and was about to begin the sacramental phrase for the third time, when La Beaupertuys made a sign of consent, which caused him to lose countenance and his lips parted with many a radiation, like a true virgin's.

"How wast thou able," said Dunois, "to keep thy face straight in presence of six thousand crowns?"

"Oh! monseigneur, first I thought of a suit of mine which is to be tried to-morrow; and secondly of my wife, who is a most tormenting plague."

The longing to win this noteworthy sum made them try again and again, and during a full hour the king was diverted by the antics of those faces, the preparations, grimaces, and other monkeyish *paternosters* they performed; but they rubbed their bellies with a basket; and to those who preferred the sleeve to the arm it was a very bitter pang to have to count out each a hundred crowns to madame.

When they had taken leave, said Nicole boldly to the king:

"Is it your will that I should try, sire?"

"*Pasques-Dieu!* no," said Louis the Eleventh; "I will kiss yours for less money."

Those were the words of a prudent man, the which, in very truth, he was always.

One evening, fat Cardinal Balue pursued with gallant advances somewhat farther than the canons

allowed, this same Beaupertuys, who, luckily for her, was a shrewd jade whom one could not with safety ask how many stitches there were in her mother's shift.

"Hark ye, monsieur le cardinal," said she, "the king likes not to receive holy oils."

Then came Olivier le Daim, nor would she listen to him, but to his folly made answer that she would ask the king if 'twere his pleasure that she should be shaved.

Now, forasmuch as the said barber did not beg her to hold his pursuit secret, she misdoubted that these manœuvres were wiles practised by the king, whose suspicions had perchance been roused by his friends. And so, not being able to take vengeance on Louis the Eleventh, she determined to make sport of the said lords, to hold them up to ridicule, and to divert the king by the tricks she would play upon them. One evening, then, when they had come to supper, she had a lady from the town who craved speech of the king. This lady was a person of authority, who had to solicit the pardon of her husband, which, as the result of this adventure, she obtained. Nicole Beaupertuys, having detained the king a moment in a closet, bade him ply all their guests with food and drink; and that he should be merry, in the mood for jesting; but that, when the cloth was removed, he should pick some trivial quarrel with them, pluck their words to pieces, deal harshly with them, and that then she would divert him by showing him how much hay they had on their horns; lastly, that

he must feign great friendship to the said lady in every way, and that he must seem to be in good faith therein, as if she enjoyed the perfume of his favor, for that she had obligingly lent her aid to this merry prank.

"Well, messieurs," said the king, returning to the guests, "let us to table, the hunt was a long and good one."

And the barber, the cardinal, a stout bishop, the captain of the Scottish Guard, and an envoy from the parliament, a lawyer, whom the king loved, followed the two ladies into the hall where the jaws are kept in practice.

And thereupon they lined the mould of their doublets with nap. What does that mean? It means paving the stomach, performing natural chemistry, examining the dishes, regaling the belly, digging one's grave with the play of the jaws, playing with the sword of Cain, burying the sauces, sustaining a cuckold; but, more philosophically, it means making dung with the teeth. Now do you understand? How many words are needed to pierce your understanding? The king was at no loss to distil that most excellent supper into his guests. He stuffed them with green peas, returning to the ragout, extolling the plums, commending the fish, saying to one: "Why do you not eat?" To another: "Let us drink to madame!" To all: "Messieurs, taste the lobsters! let us make an end of this bottle! Like you not these chitterlings? And this lamprey, eh? have you naught to say to

it? *Pasques-Dieu!* there is the finest barbel in the Loire! Come, dip into this pasty! This is game of my own hunting, and he who will have none of it puts an affront upon me!"—And again: "Drink! the king knows naught of it! Say a word to these preserves, they are madame's. Nibble these grapes, they are from my vine. Oh! let us feast upon medlars!"

And, while helping them to inflate their main protuberances, the merry monarch laughed with them, and they joked, disputed, spit, blew their noses, frolicked as if the king had not been there. Thus was so abundant a freight of food taken aboard, so many flagons drained, so many ragouts wrecked, that the faces of the guests became of a bright scarlet, their doublets seemed on the point of bursting, seeing that they were all stuffed like saveloys from Troyes, from their gullets to their paunches' vent. Returning to the salon, they perspired lavishly, puffed, and began to curse their gluttony. The king was silent. All the others held their peace, the more readily that all their energies were employed in looking after the internal digestion of the messes fermenting in their stomachs, which gurgled and rumbled vigorously. One said aside: "I was unwise to eat of that sauce."—Another reviled himself for having eaten bountifully of a dish of eels served with capers. This one thought within himself: "Oh! oh! the chitterlings are picking a quarrel with me."—The cardinal, who was of all the most pot-bellied, snorted through his nostrils

like a frightened horse. He it was who first of all was fain to give egress to a mighty belch; and right well would have liked then to be in Germany, where people salute you at such times; for, on hearing that gastriform remark, the king looked at the cardinal and frowned.

"What means this?" said he; "in God's name, am I a simple clerk?"

These words were heard in dismay, for the king was wont to think highly of a well-delivered belch. The other guests took counsel with themselves how they could dispose otherwise of the vapors which were already swarming in their pancreatic vessels. And first of all they tried to contain them for a brief space in the folds of the mesentery. Then it was that, seeing them swell up like tax-gatherers, La Beaupertuys led the good king aside and said to him:

"Now, you must know that I have had made by Peccard the jeweller two great dolls like this lady and myself. Now, when yonder fellows, sore bestead by the drugs I put in their goblets, go to the judgment-seat, whither we are now about to seem to betake ourselves, they will always find the place taken. Knowing this, you will enjoy their writhings."

This much having said, La Beaupertuys disappeared with the lady, to go and turn the winch after the custom of women, of which I will explain elsewhere the origin. Then, after an honest voiding of water, La Beaupertuys returned alone, causing

the guests to believe that she had left the lady in the workshop of natural alchemy. Thereupon, the king, addressing the cardinal, made him rise and talked with him in all seriousness of his affairs, holding him by the tassel of his amice. To whatsoever the king said, La Balue replied: "Yes, sire," the sooner to be delivered from that favor and to make his escape, for that the water was in his cellars and he was about to lose the key of his backdoor. All the guests had reached the point at which they no longer knew how to stay the movement of the matter to which nature has given, even more thoroughly than to water, the quality of tending to a certain level. Their said substances liquefied and flowed downward, working like insects which seek to come forth from their cocoons, raving, torturing, disregardful of the royal majesty; for naught else is so ignorant and so insolent as the said substances, and they are importunate like all prisoners who are entitled to their freedom. And so they trickled on at every movement, like eels gliding out of a net; and each had need of great efforts and skill not to succumb before the king. Louis the Eleventh took much delight in questioning his guests, and keen enjoyment in the metamorphoses of their faces, whereon were reflected the unclean grimaces of their entrails.

Said the counsellor to Olivier:

"I would gladly give my office to be in the Bruneau vineyard for half of seven minutes."

"Oh! there's no joy like a good stool. And I am

no longer surprised at the sempiternal droppings of the fly," the barber replied.

The cardinal, opining that the lady must have obtained her receipt from the Court of Accounts, left the fringe of his tassel in the king's hand, making a leap as if he had forgotten to say his prayers, and rushed toward the door.

"What's the matter, monsieur le cardinal?" said the king.

"*Pasques-Dieu!* what is the matter! 'Twould seem that everything is on a large scale with you, sire!"

The cardinal vanished, leaving the others amazed at his subtlety. He hastened vaingloriously toward the room below, loosening slightly the cords of his frock; but when he opened the beneficent door he found the lady performing her functions on the chair, like a pope about to be consecrated. Thereupon, drawing back his ripe fruit, he descended the spiral staircase to the garden. But, on the lowest stair, the barking of the dogs put him in great fear of being bitten in one of his precious hemispheres, and, knowing not where to discharge his chemical products, he returned to the salon, all shivering, like one who hath been in the air. The others, seeing the said cardinal return, believed that he had emptied his natural reservoirs and disburdened his ecclesiastical bowels, wherefore they deemed him most fortunate. Then rose the barber hastily, as if to take account of the hangings and count the beams, but reached the door before any other of the guests,

and, loosening his belt in advance, he hummed a refrain as he walked toward the retreat. Arriving there, he was fain, like La Balue, to mutter words of excuse to that everlasting defecatress, closing the door no less promptly than he had opened it. Then he returned with his burden of accumulated molecules which blocked his interior conduits. In like manner did the other guests go forth in succession, without being able to rid themselves of most of their sauces, and soon were they all assembled once more in presence of Louis the Eleventh, as tormented as before, and exchanged glances of intelligence, understanding one another better through their posterior vents than ever they did through their mouths; for there is never aught of double meaning in the transactions of the natural parts, but everything therewith related is reasonable and easily understood, since it is a science we learn at our birth.

"I verily believe," said the cardinal to the barber, "that that lady will go on defecating till to-morrow. In God's name, what induced La Beaupertuys to invite such a diarrhœtic creature?"

"For an hour she hath been at what I would do in a twinkling," cried Olivier. "May the fever seize her!"

All the courtiers, writhing with colic, were striding to and fro to impose patience on their importunate insides, when the said lady reappeared in the salon. You may believe that they thought her lovely and charming and would gladly have kissed her on the spot where their itching was so fierce; nor ever

hailed the day with more favor than this lady who set free their poor unfortunate bellies. La Balue rose. The others, through honor, esteem, and reverence for the Church, gave way to the clergy. Then, taking patience, they continued to make grimaces, whereat the king laughed in his sleeve with Nicole, who assisted him in cutting off the respiration of these victims of their bowels. The worthy Scotch captain, who had eaten more than all the rest of a dish with which the cook had mixed a powder of laxative qualities, soiled his breeches, thinking only to quietly ease the wind. He retired shamefaced to a corner, hoping that, in the king's presence, the stuff would be respectful enough to give forth no odor. At this moment, the cardinal returned, horrifically distressed, because he had found La Beaupertuys on the episcopal seat. Now, in his torment, not knowing that she was in the room, he returned, and uttered a diabolical *Oh!* when he saw her near his master.

"What is this, sirrah?" demanded the king, eyeing the priest in a way to give him the fever.

"Sire," said La Balue, insolently, "the affairs of purgatory are within my jurisdiction, and I am in duty bound to tell you that there is witchcraft in this house."

"Ah! vile priest, wouldst thou jest with me?" said the king.

At these words, the guests could no longer distinguish their breeches from the lining, and voided from fear with great violence.

"Oho! do ye fail thus in the respect due me?" thundered the king, whereat they turned pale.—"Holà! Tristan, my gossip!" he called through the window, rising of a sudden, "come up hither."

The grand provost was not slow to appear, and as these lords were all men of little consequence, exalted by the king's favor, Louis the Eleventh, in a fit of anger, might pulverize them at his good pleasure; so that, save the cardinal, who trusted to his cassock, Tristan found them all rigid and speechless.

"Escort these gentlemen to the hall of judgment on the Mail, my gossip; they have soiled themselves from overeating."

"Am I not a pretty joker?" queried Nicole.

"The joke is good, but devilish filthy!" he replied, laughing.

These words from the royal lips told the courtiers that the king had not been pleased this time to toy with their heads, for which they blessed God. This monarch dearly loved such filthy tricks. He was not an evil-minded man, as the guests said while they squatted at ease on the edge of the Mail, with Tristan, who, like a good Frenchman, bore them company and escorted them to their homes. That is why the bourgeois of Tours have never since failed to defecate on the Mail du Chardonneret, forasmuch as the courtiers had been there.

I will not bid adieu to this great king's hose, without putting in writing the excellent hoax which he put upon La Godegrand, who was an old maid, in

sore chagrin that she had found no lid to her pot during the forty years she had lived, frantic in her leathery skin in that she was still as chaste as a mule. The said old maid had her abode on the other side of the house that belonged to La Beaupertuys, at the place where Rue de Hiérusalem now is, so that, by perching on a balcony fastened to the wall, it was abundantly easy to see what she did and hear what she said in a lower room where she lived; and many a time the king was greatly amused by this old maid, who knew not that she was so under the culverin of our said lord the king. One market-day, it happened that the king caused to be hanged a young bourgeois of Tours, who had ravished a noble dame, somewhat advanced in years, thinking her to be a young girl. Therein there was no harm, and it would have been most creditable to the said lady to have been taken for a virgin; but, on discovering that he had gone astray, he had assailed her with repeated insults; and, suspecting her of deceit, had thought best to rob her of a beautiful silver-gilt goblet, in payment of the loan he had made her. The said young man had very long, dishevelled hair, and was so well-favored that the whole town wished to see him hanged, from regret and also from curiosity. Be sure that there were at the hanging more caps than hats. In truth, the said young man swung very prettily; and, according to the manners and customs of the hanged in those days, died gallantly, lance in rest, whereof there was much talk in the town. Many ladies said

thereupon that it was downright murder not to have spared so noble a breeches-knight.

"What do you say to putting the comely body in La Godegrand's bed?" La Beaupertuys asked the king.

"We should frighten her," replied Louis the Eleventh.

"*Nenni*, sire! Be sure that she will welcome a dead man, so great is her longing for a living one. Yesterday, I saw her acting like a madwoman with a young man's cap which she had placed on top of a chair, and heartily would you have laughed at her words and her mummery."

Now, while this maiden of forty was at Vespers, the king sent some to cut down the young bourgeois who had just completed the last scene of his tragic farce; and, having dressed him in a white shirt, two lackeys climbed the wall of La Godegrand's little garden, and laid the said hanged man in the bed, on the side next the wall. Then they went away, and the king remained in the room adjoining the balcony, toying with La Beaupertuys while awaiting the old maid's hour for retiring. Ere long, La Godegrand returns, *ta, ta, belle, belle,* as the good people of Touraine say, from the church of Saint-Martin, from which she was not far distant, since Rue de Hiérusalem touches the cloister walls. She enters her house, lays aside her purse, chaplet, rosary, and other weapons which old maids carry; then rakes down the fire, blows it, warms her toes, seats herself in her chair, caresses her cat for lack of

something else; then goes to the buttery, sighing sups and supping sighs, eats all alone, gazing at her hangings; and, after drinking, vents wind lustily, which the king hears.

"Hein! what if the corpse should say: 'God bless you!'"

At this query from La Beaupertuys, one and all laughed silently. And the Most Christian King, watching close, witnessed the disrobing of the old maid, who, as she laid aside her clothes, gazed upon herself in admiration, extracting a hair or scratching a pimple that had maliciously appeared on a nostril, then picking her teeth and doing a thousand trivial things which all women do, alas! virgins or not, to their great vexation; but, save for the slight defects of nature, they would be too proud and one could no more enjoy them. Having finished her aquatic and musical discourse, the old maid crawled between her sheets, and gave a fine, loud, sufficient, and curious shriek, when she saw, when she felt, the cold body of the hanged man and smelt his sweet odor of youth; then sprang far away from him, through coquetry. But as she knew not that he was really dead, she returned, thinking that he made sport of her and feigned death.

"Begone, wicked jester!" she said.

But be sure that she proffered these words in a most humble and most gracious tone. Then, seeing that he moved not, she examined him more closely and marvelled greatly at that so beauteous human form, recognizing the young bourgeois, upon whom

the whim seized her to make divers purely scientific experiments in the interest of the hanged.

"Prithee, what does she?" La Beaupertuys asked the king.

"She tries to restore him to life. 'Tis a work of Christian kindness."

And the old maid rubbed and curried this comely youth, imploring Saint Mary the Egyptian to assist her to reanimate this husband who fell from heaven to her, overflowing with love, when of a sudden, as she gazed at the corpse into which she was charitably infusing warmth, she thought she saw a faint movement of the eyes; then put her hand to the man's heart and felt it beat feebly. Finally, by virtue of the warmth of the bed, affection, and the temperature of old maids, which is the most scorching of all the squalls from the African deserts, she had the joy of restoring life to this handsome gallant, who, as it happened, had been very badly hanged.

"See how my executioners serve me!" said Louis the Eleventh, laughing.

"Oh!" said La Beaupertuys, "surely you'll not have him hanged again; he is too pretty a fellow."

"The decree saith not that he shall be twice hanged; but he shall marry the old maid."

Meanwhile, the excellent creature went with all speed to fetch a leech,—an honest barber who lived at the abbey,—and speedily brought him. He straightway took his lancet, bled the young man, and as the blood came not forth—

"Ah! 'tis too late," he said, "the transfusion of blood into the lungs hath taken place!"

But suddenly the rich blood oozed a little, then came in abundance, and the hempen apoplexy, which had but begun, was stayed in its course. The young man stirred, showed more signs of life; then fell, by the working of nature, into great weakness and profound melancholy, prostration of the flesh, and limpness of everything. Then the old maid, who was all eyes and followed the great and noteworthy changes that took place in the person of this imperfectly hanged man, pulled the barber's sleeve, and, pointing with a curious glance to the pitiable member, said:

"Will it be like that henceforth?"

"Even so! very often," replied the truthful surgeon.

"Oh! he was much better when hanged."

At this speech, the king laughed loud and long. Seeing him through the window, the old maid and the surgeon were sore afraid, forasmuch as that laugh seemed to them a second death-sentence for their poor hanged man. But the king kept his word and married them. Then, that justice might be done, he gave the name of Sieur de Mortsauf to the husband, in place of the name he had lost on the scaffold. As La Godegrand had a goodly store of crowns, they founded an honorable family of Touraine, which doth still exist in great honor, since Monsieur de Mortsauf served Louis the Eleventh most loyally on divers occasions. But he misliked

to fall in with gallows or old women, nor would he receive amorous assignations for the night-time.

This teaches us to identify and recognize women fully, and not to be misled by the individual differences which exist between old and young; for, if we be not hanged for our errors in love, there be always great risks to run.

THE CONSTABLE'S WIFE

D'Armignac the Constable married, being ambitious of great fortune, the Comtesse Bonne, who was already most becomingly enamored of little Savoisy, son of the chamberlain to Monseigneur King Charles the Sixth.

The constable was a rude man of war, pitiable of aspect, with a tanned hide, covered with hair, always using savage words, always busily engaged in hanging, always covered with the sweat of battle, or dreaming of other strategy than that of love. And so this worthy soldier, little caring to add zest to the ragout of marriage, used his sweet wife like a man whose mind is bent upon loftier views; the which ladies hold in holy horror, forasmuch as they love not to have the bedposts for sole judges of their endearments and lusty bouts.

Wherefore the good countess, when she was the constable's lady, nibbled only the more eagerly at the love with which her heart was overflowing for the said Savoisy; the which that worthy clearly saw. Choosing both to study the same music, they had soon tuned their lutes and deciphered the score; and it was a thing proved beyond a peradventure to Queen Isabelle that Savoisy's horses were more

often stabled at her cousin d'Armignac's than at the Hôtel Saint-Paul, where the chamberlain dwelt after the destruction of his own house, done by order of the University, as all know.

This chaste and virtuous princess, anticipating some redoubtable pitfall for Bonne, the more as the said constable no more hesitated to play with his sword than a priest to give benedictions, the said queen, sharp as a leaden dagger, said one day, on going forth from Vespers, to her cousin, who was taking holy water with Savoisy:

"My love, see you not blood in that water?"

"La, madame!" said Savoisy to the queen, "love loves blood!"

The which the queen deemed a very apt reply, and put it in writing and later in action, when her lord the king punished one of her lovers, whose favor you will see just dawning in this tale.

You know, by many an experiment, that, during the springtime of love, each of the two lovers hath always great dread of revealing the mystery of the heart, and, in part from the sweet flower of prudence, in part for the pleasure afforded by the pleasant ruses of love-making, they vie with each other in hiding the truth. But one day of forgetfulness is enough to undo all past precautions. The poor woman is entangled in her joy as in a net; her friend betrays his presence, or sometimes a leave-taking, by some traces of breeches, scarfs, or spurs left behind by a fatal hazard; and lo! a dagger-thrust severs the woof so gallantly woven by their golden

joys. But, when overflowing are the days, one must not pout at death; and a husband's sword is a noble demise in gallantry, if noble demise there be! Thus were the sweet amours of the constable's lady likely to end.

One morning, when Monsieur d'Armignac had a brief period of leisure by reason of the flight of the Duc de Bourgogne, who had left Lagny, the constable bethought himself to bid his lady good-morning, and determined to awaken her by so sweet a means that she would not be angry; but she, wallowing in the rich drowsiness of morning, responded to the movement without raising her eyelids:

"I prithee, desist, Charles!"

"Oho!" said the constable, on hearing a saint's name who was not among her patron saints, "so I have a Charles in my bed!"

Thereupon, without laying hand upon his wife, he jumped out of the bed and went upstairs, with face aflame and drawn sword, to the place where the countess's maid slept, misdoubting that the said maid had a finger in the pie.

"Ah! strumpet of hell," he cried, beginning to give vent to his passion, "say thy prayers, for I purpose to kill thee on the spot, because of the doings of the Charles who comes hither."

"Ah! monseigneur," replied the woman, "who hath told you that?"

"Be assured that I will slay thee without remission, if thou dost not confess every assignation made and in what manner they correspond: if thy tongue

falters, if thou dost balk, then will I nail thee with my dagger. Speak!"

"Nail me!" retorted the girl; "you shall know nothing!"

The constable, having taken in ill part this admirable reply, struck her down, so inflamed was he with wrath; then returned to his wife's chamber and said to his esquire, whom he met on the stairs, aroused by the girl's shrieks:

"Go up; I have chastised La Billette somewhat harshly."

Before he reappeared in Bonne's presence, he went to fetch his son, who was sleeping as children sleep, and dragged him to her room in a manner far from gentle. The mother opened her eyes, and opened them wide, as you may imagine, at her little one's shrieks; then was greatly excited to see him in the hands of her husband, whose right hand was bloody and who cast a lurid glance at mother and son.

"What is the matter?" said she.

"Madame," demanded the man of prompt action, "is this child the fruit of my loins or Savoisy's, your friend?"

At that question, Bonne turned pale and pounced upon her son, as a frightened frog leaps into the water.

"Ah! he is ours in very truth!" she said.

"If you would not see his head roll at your feet, confess to me and answer frankly. You have given me a lieutenant?"

"Even so!"

"Who is he?"

"He is not Savoisy, and I will never tell the name of a man whom I know not."

Thereupon, the constable rose, seized his wife's arm to cut her short with a sword-thrust; but she, bestowing an imperious glance upon him, cried:

"Kill me, if you will, but never lay hand upon me more!"

"You shall live," rejoined the husband, "because I reserve for you a punishment more suitable than death."

And, dreading the machinery, snares, arguments, and wiles familiar to women in such emergencies whereof they study, night and day, the varying aspects, alone or among themselves, he departed on the heels of that harsh and bitter speech. He went without delay to question his servants, displaying to them a face divine in its wrath; wherefore they all made answer as to God the Father on the last day when each one of us must render his account.

No one of them realized the serious malevolence which lay at the bottom of these summary questionings and astute conversations; but from all that they said, it was concluded by the constable that no male member of the household had a finger in the sauce, save only one of his dogs which he found mute and to which he had given the gardens in charge. Thereupon he took him in his hands and strangled him in his rage. This fact led him by a natural sequence to suppose that the sub-constable came to his house by way of the garden, which had no other issue than a postern opening on the water's edge. It should be

said, for the behoof of those who are ignorant of the location of the d'Armignac mansion, that it occupied a fine site near the royal palaces of Saint-Paul. On this spot was built the palace of the Longuevilles. Now, at this time, the d'Armignac mansion had a portico of fine stone on Rue Saint-Antoine; was fortified on all sides, and the high walls toward the river, opposite the Isle aux Vaches, in the place where the port of La Grève now is, were furnished with turrets. This design was seen long since at the house of Sieur Cardinal Duprat, the king's chancellor. The constable emptied his brain; and at the bottom selected the best from among his shrewdest artifices, and adapted it so perfectly to the case then at hand, that the gallant must perforce be caught like a rabbit in a trap.

"God's death!" he said, "my planter of horns is caught, and I have time to consider how I shall deal with him."

This is the plan of battle which this excellent hairy captain, who fought so lustily against Duc Jean-Sans-Peur, laid down for the assault upon his secret enemy. He took a goodly number of his most attached and skilful archers, stationed them in the turrets on the quay, bidding them under the harshest penalties to fire, without distinction of persons, save only his wife, upon any of his household who should offer to leave the gardens, or to admit therein by night or by day the favored lover. The same was done on the side of the portico on Rue Saint-Antoine.

The retainers, even the chaplain, were ordered

not to go from the house under pain of death. Then, the care of the two flanks of the house having been committed to troopers of his free company, whose duty it was to keep close watch in the side streets, the unknown lover, to whom the constable was debtor for his pair of horns, must perforce be seized red-handed, if, suspecting naught, he should come, at love's accustomed hour, to set up his standard insolently at the heart of the lawful property of the said lord count.

'Twas a trap whereinto the shrewdest of men was like to fall, unless, haply, he were as ardently protected by God as good Saint Peter by the Saviour when he prevented him from going to the bottom, on the day that the fancy came to them to try if the sea were as solid as the dry land.

The constable had business with them of Poissy, and was to take horse after dinner, so that, knowing this plan, poor Comtesse Bonne had conceived the idea, the night before, of summoning her young suitor to that pretty duel wherein she was always the stronger.

While the constable thus drew a girdle of eyes and of death about his mansion, and stationed men in ambush near the postern, to fall upon the gallant at his coming forth, not knowing from what quarter he might appear, his lady did not divert herself by stringing peas or looking for black cows in the embers.

Firstly, the wounded maid came to herself, and, dragging herself to her mistress's room, told her that

the cuckold lord knew nothing, and, before giving up the ghost, she consoled her dear mistress, assuring her that she could trust in her sister, who was laundress in the house, and of a temper to let herself be chopped as fine as sausage-meat to please madame; that she was the shrewdest and slyest jade in the quarter, and renowned from the Tournelles to the Croix-du-Trahoir among the humble, as being fertile in artifices for pressing emergencies of love.

Thereupon, while deploring the death of her faithful maid, the countess summoned the laundress, bade her leave her tubs, and with her set about ransacking the bag of shrewd artifices, intent upon saving Savoisy at the cost of all her happiness to come.

And first of all, the two women considered how they could inform him of the suspicions of the lord of the manor and bid him remain away.

And so the worthy laundress loads herself with linen like a mule, and essays to leave the house. But in the porch she found a man-at-arms, who lent a deaf ear to all the laundress's expostulations. Thereupon, with extraordinary devotion, she resolved to attack the soldier on his weak side, and excited him by so much fondling, that he willingly played the game with her, although he was harnessed as if for battle; but, after the game, would not let her go into the street, and, although she tried to obtain a passport from some of the most comely troopers, thinking that they would be more gallant,

not one of the archers, men-at-arms, or others dared open to her a single one of the narrowest issues from the house.

"You are vile ingrates," she said to them, "not to give like for like."

Luckily, at this trade, she discovered the whole secret and returned in great haste to her mistress, to whom she revealed the count's strange proceedings.

The two women held council anew, and had not conversed long enough to sing two *Alleluias* on this warlike demonstration, watches set, defences manned, equivocal orders and arrangements, secret, specious, and devilish, ere they realized, by virtue of the sixth sense with which every female is supplied, the special peril which threatened the poor lover.

Madame, having soon learned that she alone had liberty to leave the house, determined straightway to profit by this license; but she went not so far as a crossbow-shot, since the constable had ordered four of his pages to be always at hand to attend the countess, and two ensigns of his company never to leave her.

So the poor woman returned to her chamber, weeping as bitterly as all the Magdalens together weep whom we see in church pictures.

"Alack!" said she, "my lover is to be slain, and I shall never see him more! he who was so sweet of speech, so charming of manner! That beautiful head which has rested so often on my knees will be

mangled!—Stay! might I not toss to my husband an empty head of no worth, instead of that head overflowing with charms and merit? a vile head for a perfumed head? a hated head for a head of love?"

"Ha! madame," cried the laundress, "suppose we should trick out in a nobleman's clothes the cook's son who is mad with love of me and bores me to distraction, and when he is thus equipped we could put him out through the postern?"

At that, the two women glanced at each other with fiendishly murderous eyes.

"That spoil-sauce once killed," she continued, "all these soldiers would fly away like cranes."

"Even so. But would not the count recognize the scullion?"

And the countess, beating her breast and shaking her head, cried:

"No, no, my dear, noble blood must be shed, and without stint."

Then she thought a while, and, jumping for joy, of a sudden she embraced the laundress, saying:

"Forasmuch as I have saved my love by thy counsel, to the end of thy days will I pay thee for his life."

Thereupon the countess dried her tears, assumed the expression of a happy bride, took her purse, her book of Hours, and sallied forth to the Church of Saint Paul, whose bells she heard ringing, as the last mass was about to be said. And the countess never missed that beautiful service, being, like all the women of the court, given to vain show.

Indeed, that mass was called the *full-dress mass*, for that none were seen there, save dandies, be-curled youths, young noblemen, and richly-attired women redolent of perfumes; in fine, there were no gowns but bore a crest, no spurs but were gilded.

Countess Bonne set forth, then, leaving at the house the wonderstruck laundress, strictly enjoined to have her eyes on the alert, and came in great state to the church, attended by her pages, two ensigns, and men-at-arms.

It is time to say that, among the band of pretty cavaliers who fluttered about the ladies in the church, the countess had more than one whose heart's delight she was, and who had devoted himself to her service in all loyalty, according to the custom of youth, when we enter many and many a name on our tablets, to the end that we may make a conquest of one at least of the great number.

Of these dainty birds of prey, who held their beaks open and looked toward the benches and the sinners more often than toward the altar and the priests, there was one upon whom the countess did sometimes bestow the blessed boon of a glance, for that he was less foppish and more deeply fascinated than all the rest.

This one held aloof, always leaning against the same pillar, never moving, and in very truth enraptured by the mere sight of the lady he had chosen for his own. His pale face was tinged with soft

melancholy. His features gave proof of a heart of good temper, one of those which feed on ardent passions and burrow blissfully in the despair of a hopeless love. Of such men there be few, for that, in general, they care more for the thing which you know than for the unfamiliar felicities which lie and bloom in the lowest depths of the soul.

The said nobleman, albeit his clothes were well-fashioned and neat and simple, and with more or less taste displayed in their cut, seemed to the constable's lady to be in all likelihood a poor knight in quest of fortune, who had come from afar with his cape and sword for his whole patrimony. And so, in part because she suspected his secret poverty; in part because she was beloved by him; a little because he had a comely countenance, beautiful black hair, very long, and a fine figure, and was always humble and resigned to everything, the constable's lady desired for him the favor of her sex and good-fortune. Furthermore, in order to keep her hand in with gallants, and obeying the impulse of a good housekeeper, she warmed his heart at times, according to her caprice, by some trivial favor, a fleeting glance, which glided toward him like a venomous asp; making sport of all the happiness of that young life, like a princess accustomed to toy with objects of more value than a simple knight. In sooth, her husband, the constable, risked the kingdom and all else, as you would risk a counter at piquet.

At last, not three days before this day, the constable's lady said, laughing to the queen as they

came forth from Vespers, indicating with a glance this herald of love:

"There is a man of merit."

The phrase remained in fashionable language. Later, it became a method of designating the people of the court. It was to the wife of Constable d'Armignac, and to no other source, that the French tongue is indebted for this charming expression.

As it happened, the countess had reasoned truly in respect to the said nobleman. He was a bannerless knight whose name was Julien de Boys-Bourredon, who, not having inherited with his fief enough wood to so much as make him a toothpick, and being possessed of no more valuable property than the opulent nature with which his deceased mother had endowed him most opportunely, conceived the plan of drawing revenue and profit therefrom at court, knowing how greedy the ladies are of that sort of property and take it at any price, however high, although it can always be obtained between sunset and sunrise. Many like him there be who have taken the narrow pathway of womankind to reach their goal; but he, far from investing his love to yield regular returns, spent principal and all so soon as, having attended the full-dress mass, he saw the Countess Bonne's triumphal beauty. Therefrom, there issued a genuine love, which was most opportune for his crowns, forasmuch as he lost his appetite both for food and drink. This love is of the worst sort, for it incites you to the love of diet

during the diet of love; a twofold disease, either branch of which is enough to undo a man.

Such was the young gentleman of whom the constable's good lady had thought, and to whom she betook herself apace to invite him to die.

Upon entering, she spied the poor knight, who, loyal to her pleasure, awaited her coming, his back against the pillar, as an invalid stands drinking in the sunlight at daybreak in spring. Thereupon she turned her eyes away and would go to the queen to seek her aid in this desperate affair, for she had compassion on her lover; but one of the captains said to her, with great show of respect:

"Madame, the orders are that you have liberty to speak to no one, man or woman, even though it be the queen or your confessor. And be sure that all our lives are at stake."

"Prithee, is it not your trade to die?" said she.

"And also to obey," rejoined the soldier.

With that the countess knelt to pray in her accustomed place; and, glancing yet again at her servitor, it seemed to her that his face was thinner and more hollow than ever it had been.

"Pshaw!" said she, "I shall have the less remorse for his death. He is quasi-dead even now."

Thus paraphrasing her idea, she cast at the said nobleman one of those burning glances which are permitted to none but princesses or harlots; and the feigned love to which her lovely eyes bore witness caused the gallant of the pillar a sweet pang. Who doth not love the warm onslaught of life when it

flows thus around the heart and inflates everything? The constable's lady discovered anew, with a pleasure ever novel to a woman's heart, the omnipotence of her superb glance, by the reply which the chevalier made without speaking a word. In very truth, the flush which overspread his cheeks spake louder than the most eloquent words of Greek or Roman orators, and so made themselves understood. At that pleasant sight, the countess, to be sure that it was not a mere game on nature's part, took pleasure in experimenting to see how far the power of her eyes would go. And after having warmed her suitor's blood more than a score of times, she was well persuaded that he was capable of dying gallantly for her. This thought touched her so deeply that thrice, between her prayers, she was inflamed with the desire to bestow upon him in a heap all the joys of mankind, and to resolve them all for him into a single stream of love, in order to avoid the reproach some day of having destroyed not the life alone, but also the happiness of this young cavalier. When the officiating priest turned to sing the *Nunc dimittis* to this gorgeous, gilded congregation, the constable's lady went from the church by the pillar where her suitor stood, passed before him, and tried to hint to him by a meaning glance that he should follow her; then, to make sure that he understood and properly interpreted that slight summons, the sly creature turned a little after passing, as if once more to demand his attendance. She saw that he had stepped forward a little

way from his place and dared not advance, so modest he was; but, at this last signal, the gentleman, sure of not being deemed over-presumptuous, joined the cortége, with light, noiseless tread, like a virtuous youth who dreads to appear in one of those pleasant places which men call bad. And, whether he walked backward or forward, to right or left, the countess constantly darted at him a flashing glance to lure him on and the better to draw him to her, as a fisherman gently raises the line to feel the weight of the gudgeon. To be brief, the countess plied so shrewdly the trade of the *filles de joie* when they are striving to bring the holy water to their mills that you would have said that nothing is so like a harlot as a woman of high birth. And in truth, on reaching the door of her abode, the countess hesitated to enter; then turned her face once more toward the poor knight, to invite him to attend her, discharging at him a glance so diabolical that he hastened toward the queen of his heart, believing that she had called him. She straightway offered him her hand, and both, boiling and shivering from contrary causes, found themselves within the house. In that evil hour, Madame d'Armignac was ashamed that she had done all these harlot's tricks to the advantage of death, and had been false to Savoisy the better to save him; but this faint remorse was as halting as the greater, and came tardily. Seeing that everything was at stake, she leaned heavily on her suitor's arm and said to him:

"Come quickly to my chamber, for I needs must speak to you."

And he, not knowing that his life was at stake, could find no voice to reply, so suffocated was he by the hope of happiness near at hand. When the laundress saw this fine gentleman so quickly caught:

"God ha' mercy!" said she, "there be none like court ladies for such tasks!"

Then she examined the courtier, bestowing upon him a deep courtesy, wherein was expressed the ironical respect due to them who have the great courage to die for so small a matter.

"Picarde," said the countess, drawing the laundress to her by her skirt, "I feel that I lack strength to tell him the reward I propose to give him for his silent love and his sweet faith in the loyalty of women."

"Pshaw! madame, why tell him? Send him away content through the postern. So many men die in war for trifles! why should this one not die for something? I will produce another like him, if that will comfort you."

"Nay!" cried the countess, "I will tell him everything. That shall be the punishment of my sin."

Thinking that his lady was making some trivial, secret arrangements with the servant, in order not to be disturbed in the audience she promised him, the unknown lover stood discreetly aloof, watching the flies. None the less he thought that the countess was very bold; but, at the same time, as even a hunchback would have done, he found a thousand excuses to justify her, and deemed himself most

worthy to inspire such madness. He was absorbed in these pleasant thoughts, when the constable's lady opened her closet and invited her cavalier to follow her thither. There this puissant dame laid aside all the symbols of her exalted fortune and became a simple woman, falling at this gentleman's feet.

"Alas! fair sir," she said, "I am sadly at fault in your regard. Listen. On your going forth from this house, you will meet death. The love of another which fills my heart hath blinded me; and, although you cannot take his place here, you must needs take it before his murderers. This is the pleasure which I asked of you."

"Ah!" replied Boys-Bourredon, burying a black despair in the depths of his heart. "I give you thanks for having made use of me as a chattel belonging to you. Yes, I love you so well that every day I dream of offering you, in imitation of the ladies, a thing that can be given but once! Take my life, therefore!"

And the poor fellow, as he spoke, gazed at her in one instant for all the time he might have had to see her in many days. Hearing those brave and loving words, Bonne suddenly rose:

"Ah! were it not for Savoisy, how I would love thee!" she exclaimed.

"Alas! then is my destiny accomplished," rejoined Boys-Bourredon. "My horoscope foretells that I shall die through the love of a great lady. Ah! *Dieu!*" he added, grasping his good sword,

THE CONSTABLE'S WIFE

And, in truth, Monsieur d'Armignac did very soon appear, having in his hand a head, and, laying it all bloody on the chimney-shelf, said:

"Behold, madame, a picture which will instruct you concerning a wife's duties toward her husband."

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"Ah! were it not for Savoisy, how I would love thee!" she exclaimed.

"Alas! then is my destiny accomplished," replied Boys-Bourredon. "My heart [illegible] I shall die through the love of [illegible]" he added, grasping her hand;

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"I will sell my life dearly; but I shall die content in the thought that my death assures the happiness of her I love! I shall live better in her memory than in the flesh."

At sight of the bearing and the glowing features of that brave man, the countess was smitten to the heart. But straightway she was stung to the quick because he seemed disposed to leave her without even seeking a trifling favor at her hands.

"Come, let me arm you," she said, making a motion as if to embrace him.

"Ah! madame," he replied, while a tear dimmed the fire of his eyes, "would you make my death impossible by attaching too great a value to my life?"

"Come!" she cried, conquered by this ardent love, "I know not the end of all this! but come. After, we will both go to our deaths at the postern!"

The same flame burning both their hearts, the same chord being struck for both, they embraced in the good old way, and, in the blissful paroxysm of that fierce fever, which you know, I trust, they fell into utter forgetfulness of Savoisy's peril and their own, of the constable, death, life, everything.

Meanwhile, the men on guard at the portico had gone to inform the constable of the gallant's coming, and to tell him how the love-mad gentleman had paid no heed to the glances which the countess had bestowed on him during the mass and on the road, to prevent him from being undone. They met their

master hurrying with all speed to the postern, because his archers on the quay, on their side, had called to him from afar, saying:

"The Sire de Savoisy comes."

And, in truth, Savoisy had come at the hour appointed, and, like all lovers, thinking only of his lady, had failed to see the count's spies, and had stolen in through the postern. This surplus of lovers caused the constable to cut short the words of those who came from Rue Saint-Antoine, telling them, with an imperative gesture which they deemed it best not to contradict:

"I know that the beast is taken!"

Thereupon they all rushed with a great clamor through the postern, crying:

"Death! death!"

And men-at-arms, archers, constables, captains, all ran headlong at Charles Savoisy, the king's godson, whom they attacked under the countess's window, and, by an extraordinary chance, the poor youth's groans ascended piteously, blended with the yells of the troopers, while the two lovers were uttering their passionate sighs and cries. They hastened to the window in dire alarm.

"Ah!" exclaimed the countess, turning white with terror, "Savoisy dies for me!"

"But I will live for you," replied Boys-Bourredon, "and I shall deem myself most fortunate to purchase my happiness at the price he hath paid for his."

"Hide in this chest," cried the countess, "I hear the constable's footsteps."

And, in truth, Monsieur d'Armignac did very soon appear, having in his hand a head, and, laying it all bloody on the chimney-shelf, said:

"Behold, madame, a picture which will instruct you concerning a wife's duties toward her husband."

"You have slain an innocent man," the countess replied, without flinching; "Savoisy was not my lover."

And with that she gazed proudly at the constable, with a face masked by so much feminine dissimulation and audacity that the husband stood as shamefaced as a maid who emits a low rumbling note before a numerous company, and he misdoubted that he had done an evil thing.

"Of whom were you thinking, pray, this morning?"

"I was thinking of the king," she said.

"And, in that case, my love, why not have told me?"

"Would you have believed me, in the bestial wrath in which you then were?"

The constable shook his head, and retorted:

"But how had Savoisy a key to our postern?"

"Ah!" said she, shortly, "I do not know if you will have sufficient respect for me to believe the answer that I have to make to you."

And the countess turned quickly on her heel, like a weathercock turned by the wind, as if to go and attend to the affairs of her household. Be sure that Monsieur d'Armignac was sadly embarrassed by poor Savoisy's head, and that Boys-Bourredon, for his

part, had no desire to cough when he heard the count, left alone, muttering words of all sorts. At last, he struck two mighty blows on the table, and said:

"I will go and fall upon the people of Poissy!"

Thereupon he departed, and, when night had fallen, Boys-Bourredon escaped from the house under some disguise.

Poor Savoisy was deeply lamented by his lady, who had done the utmost that a woman can do to rescue a lover; and, later, he was more than lamented, he was regretted, forasmuch as, the constable's wife having related this adventure to Queen Isabella, she seduced Boys-Bourredon from her said cousin's service and enlisted him in her own, so touched was she by the noble qualities and steadfast courage of that gentleman.

Boys-Bourredon was a man whom Death had earnestly commended to the ladies. In truth, he bore himself so proudly in all respects in the exalted fortune which he owed to the queen, that, having failed in his duty to King Charles, it came to pass that on a certain day, when the poor man was enjoying his good fortune, the courtiers, jealous of his favor, informed the king of his cuckoldry. Thereupon, Boys-Bourredon was in a twinkling sewn into a bag and tossed into the Seine, near the Charenton ferry, as everyone knows.

I need not add that, from the day when the constable was so ill-advised as to play rashly with edge-tools, his good wife made such good use of the two

murders he had done and threw them in his face so often that she made him as soft as a cat's coat, and led him into the pleasant paths of marriage. He proclaimed her a chaste and virtuous constable's lady, as in good sooth she was.

As this book should, in accordance with the maxims of the great authors of antiquity, adjoin some useful thoughts to the hearty laughter it will cause, and should contain some precepts of a pleasant savor, I will tell you that the quintessence of this Tale is this: That women never need lose their heads in grave exigencies, forasmuch as the god of Love never abandons them, especially when they are beautiful, young, and of good family; and, secondly, that lovers, when on their way to keep amorous assignations, should never go thither like harebrained youths, but with precaution, and should see snares in everything about, in order not to fall into ambuscades, and to protect themselves; for, next to a virtuous woman, the most precious thing is, of a surety, a comely gentleman.

in addition to wild beasts, hunted small game; but the country was well stripped of that long-haired quarry, and it cost very dear to despoil a virgin. However, by dint of foraging and making inquiry, it happened that the lord of Valesnes learned that in Thilhouze was the widow of a weaver, who had a very treasure in the person of a little maid of sixteen years, whose skirts she had never let go, and whom she accompanied when functional needs demanded, with admirable maternal foresight; then tucked her away in her own bed; watched over her, helped her to dress in the morning, and wearied her by such constant labor that they earned together full eight sols a day; and, on feast-days, led her in leash to the church; scarce giving her leisure to exchange a merry jest with the young men; nor was anyone permitted to lay hands too freely on the maiden. But times were so hard in those days that the widow and her daughter had just bread enough not to die of hunger; and as they lived with one of their poor kindred, they often lacked wood in winter and clothes in summer; owed arrears of rent to terrify an officer of the law, who is not easily terrified by another's debts. In a word, while the daughter grew lovelier, the widow grew poorer, and fell deeply in debt for the virginity of her daughter, as an alchemist for the crucible in which he melts everything.

When his inquiries were made and perfected, one day of rain the Sire de Valesnes came, by mere chance, to the hovel of the two spinners, and, to dry himself, sent one to fetch fagots from a copse

near by. Then, while waiting, he sate himself down on a stool between the two poor women. By favor of the gray shadows and half-light of the hovel, he saw the sweet features of the maid of Thilhouze: her stout, red arms; her outworks, hard as bastions, which sheltered her heart from the cold; her waist, round as a young oak; the whole very fresh, and clean and spruce and brisk as an early frost; green and tender as an April shoot; in fine, she was the image of all that is prettiest on earth. She had eyes of a shy and virtuous blue, and a glance even more modest than the Virgin's, forasmuch as she was less advanced, having had no child.

If one had said to her: "Will you come and enjoy yourself?" she would have answered: "Lord ha' mercy! how?" so pure was she and so little open to comprehension of the thing. So did the worthy old lord twist about on his stool, sniff at the girl, and disjoint his neck like unto a monkey trying to catch walnuts. The which the mother saw plainly, nor breathed a word, for fear of the lord, who had a whole province at his discretion. When the sticks were laid on the hearth and blazed merrily, the honest sportsman said to the old woman:

"Ah! this is almost as warming as your daughter's eyes."

"Alack! my lord," she replied, "we can cook naught at that fire."

"Oh! yes," said he.

"And how?"

"Oh! my dear, lend your maid to my wife, who

THE MAID OF THILHOUZE

The lord of Valesnes, a charming domain, whose castle is not far from the village of Thilhouze, had taken a niggardly wife, who, by reason of taste or distaste, pleasure or displeasure, sickness or health, allowed her husband to fast for the pleasures and sweetmeats stipulated in all marriage-contracts. To be just, it should be said that the aforementioned lord was an exceeding vile and filthy creature, always hunting wild beasts, and no more agreeable than smoke in a house. Moreover, to settle the account, the said huntsman had seen full sixty years whereof he no more spoke than the widow of a hanged man speaks of halters. But Nature, who scatters the deformed, the crippled, the blind, and the ugly by basketfuls here on earth, albeit she has no more esteem for them than for the well-favored, forasmuch as, like the weavers of tapestry, she knows not what she does, gives the same appetite to all, and to all the same liking for the soup. And so it happens that every beast finds a stable; hence the proverb: "There's no pot so base that does not find a lid."

It came to pass, therefore, that the lord of Valesnes sought everywhere pretty pots to cover, and often,

in addition to wild beasts, hunted small game; but the country was well stripped of that long-haired quarry, and it cost very dear to despoil a virgin. However, by dint of foraging and making inquiry, it happened that the lord of Valesnes learned that in Thilhouze was the widow of a weaver, who had a very treasure in the person of a little maid of sixteen years, whose skirts she had never let go, and whom she accompanied when functional needs demanded, with admirable maternal foresight; then tucked her away in her own bed; watched over her, helped her to dress in the morning, and wearied her by such constant labor that they earned together full eight sols a day; and, on feast-days, led her in leash to the church; scarce giving her leisure to exchange a merry jest with the young men; nor was anyone permitted to lay hands too freely on the maiden. But times were so hard in those days that the widow and her daughter had just bread enough not to die of hunger; and as they lived with one of their poor kindred, they often lacked wood in winter and clothes in summer; owed arrears of rent to terrify an officer of the law, who is not easily terrified by another's debts. In a word, while the daughter grew lovelier, the widow grew poorer, and fell deeply in debt for the virginity of her daughter, as an alchemist for the crucible in which he melts everything.

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"Alack! my lord," she replied, "we can cook naught at that fire."

"Oh! yes," said he.

"And how?"

"Oh! my dear, lend your maid to my wife, who

its worth!—So put it not aside save with full knowledge and in a seemly manner. Now, in order not to sully thy virtue before God and man,—unless from lawful motives,—take good heed that thou dost powder a little thy *cas de mariage*, otherwise thou wilt suffer."

"Yes, mother," said the maid.

And thereupon she left her kinsman's poor abode and went to the château of Valesnes to serve the lady thereof, who found her very pretty and to her liking.

When the people of Valesnes, Sacché, Vilaines, and other places learned of the high price paid for the maid of Thilhouze, the worthy housewives, recognizing the fact that nothing is more profitable than virtue, strove to rear and educate all their daughters in the virgin state; but the task was as hazardous as that of raising silk-worms, which are so prone to burst, forasmuch as virgins are like medlars, and ripen speedily on the straw. However, there were girls renowned therefor in Touraine, and who were esteemed virgins in all the convents of nuns,—a fact for which I should mislike to be answerable, not having verified it in the manner taught by Verville to recognize the absolute virtue of young women.

Marie Ficquet, however, followed her mother's sage advice, and would listen to none of the soft prayers, honeyed words, and monkeyish tricks of her master, without a little sop of marriage.

When the old lord made as if he would trifle with

her, she would take fright like a cat at the approach of a dog, crying:

"I will tell madame!"

In fine, at the end of six months, the lord had not yet recovered the price of a single stick. La Ficquet, becoming always the stouter and stronger for all her labor, made answer once to her master's gracious solicitation:

"When you have taken it from me, will you give it back, hein?"

And at other times said:

"Had I as many holes as a sieve, there would be not a single one for you, so ugly do I think you!"

This worthy old man took these village sayings for flowers of virtue, nor did he fail to make little signals, long discourses, and a hundred thousand oaths; for, by dint of gazing at the stout heart-outworks of the maid, her well-rounded hips, which stood forth in bold relief through her skirts at certain movements, and by dint of admiring other matters calculated to confound the understanding of a saint, the dear goodman became enamored of her with an old man's passion, which increases in geometrical ratio, in contrast to the passions of young persons, forasmuch as the old love with their weakness which constantly increases, and the young with their strength which constantly decreases. In order to leave no pretext for refusal to this bedevilled girl, the lord took aside an old retainer of seventy years of age and more, and gave him to understand that

he ought to marry in order to warm his skin, and that Marie Ficquet would be a fitting mate for him. The old butler, who enjoyed an income of three hundred *livres Tournois* earned by divers services in the family, desired to live in peace without opening the frontdoors anew; but the good lord, having begged him to marry to do him pleasure, assured him that he need have no anxiety concerning his wife. And so the old butler, from complaisance, took upon himself the vexation of this marriage. On the day of the nuptials, Marie Ficquet, despoiled of all her arguments, and being unable to allege any grievance, extorted the grant of a huge marriage-portion and dowry as the price of her deflowering; then gave the old rogue leave to come whenever he chose to lie with her, promising him as many good bouts as he had given grains of wheat to her mother; but at his age one bushel was enough.

The ceremony at an end, the lord failed not, once his wife was between her sheets, to steal away to the chamber, well-lighted, carpeted, and dainty, where he had quartered his pullet, his revenues, his fagots, his household, his grain, and his butler.

To be brief, let me tell you that he found the maid of Thilhouze the loveliest maid on earth, as pretty as could be, by the soft light of the fire which crackled on the hearth, moving restlessly between the sheets, ready to pick a quarrel, emitting a sweet perfume of virginity; and he did not, for one instant, regret the high price of this jewel. Then,

unable to restrain himself from despatching the first mouthfuls of this luscious royal dish, the lord made ready to trifle with this young model, like a past-master. Behold, then, the happy man, who, by reason of too great gluttony, fumbles and slips, in short, no longer knows aught of the pretty trade of love. Seeing which, the good maid says innocently, after a moment, to her old cavalier:

"Monseigneur, if you are there, as I believe, pray shake your bells a little harder."

This saying, which became known in due time, I know not by what means, made Marie Ficquet famous, and we still say in our parts: "She is a maid of Thilhouze!" in mockery of a bride, and to denote a *fricquenelle.*

Fricquenelle means a kind of maid which I wish you may not find between your sheets the first night of your marriage, unless it be that you have been reared in the philosophy of the Portico, wherein one learns to be surprised at no villainy. And there be many persons constrained to be stoics at that diverting conjuncture, which is still of not unfrequent occurrence; for nature veers, but changes not, and there will always be excellent maids of Thilhouze in Touraine and elsewhere.

Now, if you should ask me wherein consists and wherein appears the moral of this Tale, I should have good title to reply to the ladies: that these *Contes Drolatiques* are written rather to teach the moral of pleasure than to procure the pleasure of making morals.

But, were my questioner a good old dandy, well used-up, I should say to him, with the graceful periphrasis due to his gray or yellow locks: that God chose to punish Sieur de Valesnes for having tried to purchase a harvest made to be given away.

THE BROTHER-IN-ARMS

In the beginning of the reign of King Henry, second of the name, who loved the fair Diane so well, there still existed a ceremony, the use of which hath since much diminished, and hath, in sooth, wholly disappeared, like an infinity of the good things of the olden time. This excellent and noble custom was the choice of a brother-in-arms, which all true knights were wont to make. Then, after each had proved the other a loyal and gallant man, each of this attractive couple was joined for life to the other; they must defend each other in battle against the foes who threatened them, and at court against the friends who spake ill of them. Were one absent, the other was bound to say to him who should accuse his brother of any disloyalty, evil-doing, or black felony: "You have lied in your throat!" and to go forth straightway to combat, so assured were they each of the other's honor. It need not be said that one was always the other's second in every affair, good or evil, and that they shared everything, good-fortune and evil-fortune alike. They were closer than brothers, who are bound together only by the hazards of nature, for that they were joined by the bonds of a special,

involuntary, and mutual sentiment. So hath the brotherhood of arms produced many noble characters, as noble as those of the ancient Greeks, Romans, or others.—But this is not my subject. The story of these things hath been written by the historian of our country, and everyone knows them.

In those days, then, two young noblemen of Touraine, of whom one was the cadet of the family of Maillé, the other Sieur de Lavallière, became brothers-in-arms on the day that they won their spurs. They came from the household of Monsieur de Montmorency, where they were reared upon the excellent doctrines of that great captain, and had proved how contagious a thing is valor in that noble company, forasmuch as they earned the praise of the oldest knights at the battle of Ravenna. It was in the midst of the slaughter of that bloody day, that Maillé, being rescued by the said Lavallière, with whom he had had some quarrels, saw that that gentleman was a noble heart. As they had both received divers slashes in their doublets, they baptized this brotherhood in their blood, and were doctored together, in the same bed, under the tent of Monsieur de Montmorency, their master. It is needful to tell you that, in contrast to the customs of his family wherein there have always been comely faces, the cadet of Maillé was not well-favored, and had little in his favor save the beauty of the devil; for the rest, he was active as a greyhound, broad of shoulder and of powerful build like King Pepin, who was a redoubtable jouster. On

the other hand, Sire de Château-Lavallière was a dandified fellow, for whom fine laces, rich trunk-hose, and open shoes seemed to have been invented. His long, fair hair was as pretty as a lady's head-dress; and he was, in a word, a child with whom any woman would have liked right well to play. And one day the dauphiness, niece to the Pope, said laughing to the Queen of Navarre, knowing that she misliked not such pleasant jests, "that that page was a poultice to cure all ills!" the which caused the pretty little Tourainer to blush, for that, being but sixteen, he took that gallant speech as a rebuke.

On his return from Italy, the cadet of Maillé found an excellent stepping-stone in the way of a marriage, which his mother had arranged in the person of Mademoiselle d'Annebault, who was a charming maiden, rich in graces and well supplied with all things, having a fine house on Rue Barbette, furnished with Italian furniture and paintings, and many considerable domains in prospect. Some days after the demise of the King of France, a misadventure which sowed universal terror in the seat of geniture, for that the said king died as a result of the *mal de Naples*, and thenceforth there was no security even with the most exalted princesses, the aforementioned Maillé was compelled to leave the court to adjust certain matters of serious importance in Piedmont. Be sure that it misliked him much to leave his dear wife, so young, so tempting, so mettlesome, amid the perils, persecutions, ambuscades,

and surprises of the gallant circle, wherein were so many comely youths, bold as eagles, proud of bearing, and as keen on the scent of women as people are hungry for hams at Easter. In this state of jealousy every plan was displeasing to him; but, by dint of much thinking, he deemed it best to padlock his wife as we are about to describe. He invited his dear brother-in-arms to come at dawn on the morning of his departure. He no sooner heard Lavallière's horse in his courtyard than he leaped out of bed, leaving his sweet, fair better half still sleeping that little dozing sleep so dear to all the devotees of sloth. Lavallière came to him and the two comrades, withdrawing to the window recess, greeted each other with a loyal grasp of the hand; then said Lavallière to Maillé:

"I should have come last night on receipt of thy missive, but I had an amorous suit to settle with my lady, who gave me assignation: therefore I could in nowise make default; but I left her betimes. Wilt thou that I go with thee? I have told her of thy departure, she hath promised me to remain without other lover, on the faith of our pact. An she deceive me, why, a friend is of more value than a mistress!"

"Oh! my dear brother," Maillé replied, deeply moved by these words, "I wish to ask of thee even a more signal proof of thy great heart. Wilt thou have charge of my wife, defend her against all, be her guide, hold her in leash, and be answerable to me for the integrity of my head? During the time

of my absence, thou shalt abide here in the green hall, and be my wife's knight."

Lavallière frowned, and said:

"Neither for thee, nor for thy wife, nor for myself do I fear, but I dread the evil-minded, who will avail themselves of this to embroil us like skeins of silk."

"Have no distrust of me," rejoined Maillé, pressing Lavallière to his heart. "If it be God's will that I have the misfortune to be cuckold, I should be less grieved wert thou to be the gainer by it. But, by my faith, I should die of grief, for I am fairly mad with love of my dear, blooming, virtuous wife."

Upon that he turned his head away that Lavallière might not see the water that came to his eyes, but the pretty courtier saw that harvest of tears, and, taking Maillé's hand, he said:

"Brother, I pledge thee my manly faith that, before anyone shall lay hand upon thy wife, he shall have felt my dagger in his entrails. And, saving my death, thou shalt find her unscathed in body if not in heart, for the thought is beyond the power of gentlemen."

"Ah! it is written on high," cried Maillé, "that I shall ever be thy slave and thy debtor!"

Thereupon, he set forth, in order not to be softened by the exclamations, tears, and other sauces of which ladies are lavish in their leave-takings; then Lavallière, having borne him company to the gates of the town, returned to the house, awaited Marie d'Annebault on her rising, apprised her of

her dear husband's departure, offered himself as being at her service, and all with manners so charming that the most virtuous woman would have been incited by a longing to keep the knight for her own. But there needed not these fine speeches to enlighten the lady, for that she had lent an ear to the conversation of the two friends, and was highly offended by her husband's doubts. Alas! be sure that God alone is perfect! In all of man's ideas there will always be an evil side; and it is, I swear, a most desirable accomplishment in life, but an impossible one, to take everything, even a club, by the right end. The cause of this great difficulty in pleasing the women is that there is in them a thing which is more woman than they, and, but for the respect which is their due, I would use another word. Now, we should never arouse the imagination of this malevolent thing. But the perfect government of women is a task to drive a man to despair, and we must needs remain in total subjection to them; that is, I opine, the best method of disentangling the very painful puzzle of marriage. Marie d'Annebault, then, feasted upon the gallant's pleasant manners and his proffers; but there was a twinge of mischief in her smile, and, to state the case frankly, a purpose to place the young guardian of her virtue between honor and pleasure; to call upon him so loudly for love, to ply him so zealously with pretty attentions, to pursue him with such warm glances, that he would be disloyal to friendship to the profit of gallantry.

Everything was in good trim for the pursuit of her plan, in view of the relations Sire de Lavallière was bound to have with her by reason of his sojourn in the house. And, as there is nothing on earth which can turn a woman from her schemes, on every occasion the sly jade spread a net to catch him.

Sometimes she kept him sitting beside her, before the fire, until midnight, singing ballads to him, and, on every pretext, showing him her fine shoulders, the white temptations whereof her corsage was full, and darting at him alluring glances innumerable; and all without displaying on her face the thoughts she had under her ear.

Sometimes she walked with him, early, in the gardens of her mansion, leaned very heavily on his arm, pressed him, sighed, made him tie the lace-string of her shoe, which was always tangled at a certain point.

Then there were a thousand pretty speeches and the things that ladies understand so well: little attentions for the guest, as the coming to see if he were comfortable; if he had a good bed; if his room were clean; if the air were good; if he felt any draughts at night; if he had too much sun by day; praying him to conceal none of his fancies or slightest wishes, saying:

"Are you in the habit of taking something in bed in the morning?—hydromel, milk, or spices? Are the hours for eating agreeable to you? I will abide by all your wishes—tell me! You fear to ask me.—Fie!"

She would accompany this pleasant cosseting with many a pretty freak, as the saying, on entering his room:

"I bore you, send me away!—Ah! I see that you must be left to yourself.—I am going."

And was she always graciously urged to remain.

And the minx came always lightly arrayed, showing specimens of her beauty fit to bring a neigh to the nostrils of a patriarch as worn out by time as Monsieur Methuselah must have been at a hundred and sixty years.

The honest youth, being as sharp as steel, interfered with none of the lady's antics, for he was well content to see that her mind was occupied with him, which was so much gained; but, like a loyal brother, he always brought the absent husband before his hostess's eyes.

Now, on a certain evening, the day having been very warm, Lavallière, mistrustful of the lady's game, told her how dearly Maillé loved her, that she had for husband a man of honor, a gentleman most ardent for her, and exceedingly ticklish on the score of his crest.

"Why, I pray to know, if he is so ticklish, hath he placed you here?"

"Is it not laudable prudence?" he replied. "Was there not need to entrust you to some defender of your virtue? not that it lacked one, but to protect you against the evil-minded?"

"Then you are my guardian?" she exclaimed.

"I am proud of it!" exclaimed Lavallière.

"By my faith!" said she, "he hath chosen ill."

This speech was accompanied by a glance so wantonly lascivious that the worthy brother-in-arms assumed, by way of reproach, a cold expression, and left the fair lady alone; who was piqued by this tacit refusal to begin the battle of love.

She remained in profound meditation and set herself to seek the real obstacle which she had encountered; for it never could enter the mind of any lady that a loyal gentleman could look with disdain upon that bagatelle which hath so much merit and such high value. Now these thoughts blended and fitted together so well, one leading to another, that, piece by piece, she drew the whole garment to her, and found herself lying in the deepest depths of love; which should teach ladies never to toy with man's weapons, since, after the manner of bird-lime, a little always clings to the fingers.

Thus did Marie d'Annebault end where she should have begun: to wit, that, if he were safe from her snares, the good knight must be caught in the snare of some other woman; and, as she looked about to see where her young guest could have found a jewel-case to his liking, she remembered that La Belle Limeuil, one of Queen Catherine's maids of honor, Mesdames de Nevers, d'Estrées, and de Giac were the declared friends of Lavallière, and that of them all there must be at least one whom he loved to madness.

With this conclusion, she added the motive of jealousy to all the others which impelled her to

seduce her Messire Argus, whose head she wished not to cut off, but to perfume and to kiss, and in no wise to injure the rest of him.

Of a surety, she was fairer, younger, daintier, and more appetizing than her rivals; at least, such was the melodious judgment of her brain. And so, impelled by all the chords, springs of conscience, and physical causes by which women are impelled, she returned to the charge, to make a fresh assault upon the chevalier's heart, for women love to take what is well fortified.

Thereupon, she played the kitten and nestled so close to him, patted him so prettily, coaxed him so sweetly, cosseted him so daintily, that, one evening, when she had fallen into a black humor, albeit she was very joyous at heart, she induced her guardian brother to ask her:

"What is the matter, pray?"

To which she made answer, dreamily, being listened to by him as the sweetest music:

That she had married Maillé against the dictates of her heart, and that she was very unhappy therefor: that she knew naught of the sweets of love; that her husband was in nowise expert therein, and that her life would be full of tears. In a word, she made herself appear a virgin in heart and in everything, since she confessed that she had never derived aught from the thing but discomfort. She said, moreover, that, of a surety, that pastime must be fruitful in sweetmeats and dainties of all sorts, for that all the ladies flocked thither, would have

it, were jealous of those who sold it to them; for there were some whom it cost dear; that she was so curious concerning it that for a single day or night of love she would lay down her life, and would be always her lover's slave, unmurmuring; but that the man with whom it would be pleasantest to do the thing would not listen to her; and yet that their lying together might be kept secret forever, in view of her husband's trust in him; and, lastly, that, if he continued to deny her, she should die of it.

And all these variations of the little canticle which all women know from their birth, were faltered forth amid innumerable silences broken by sighs torn from the heart, embellished with frequent writhings, appeals to Heaven, eyes turned upward, sudden flushes, tearings of the hair. In a word, all the herbs of Saint-John were put in the ragout. And as, beneath these words, there was a stinging desire which embellishes even the ugly, the worthy knight fell at the lady's feet, grasped them and kissed them, shedding tears. Doubt not that the excellent creature was very happy to abandon them to him to kiss; nay, without looking too closely to see what he proposed to do, she abandoned her dress to him, knowing well that he needs must take it by the hem to raise it; but it was written that she should be virtuous that evening, for the comely Lavallière said to her, with despair in his voice:

"Ah! madame, I am a villain and unworthy—"

"Nay, nay, not so!" she said.

"Alas! the joy of belonging to you is forbidden me."

"How so?" queried she.

"I dare not confess my plight to you!"

"Pray, is it so very bad?"

"Oh! I shall make you blush for very shame!"

"Say on, I will hide my face in my hands."

And the sly jade covered her face in such wise that she could see her beloved between her fingers.

"Alas!" he began, "the other evening, when you spoke to me so graciously, I was so treacherously inflamed, that, not deeming my good-fortune near at hand, and not daring to avow my flame to you, I betook myself to one of the dens to which gentlemen go; there, for love of you and to safeguard my brother's honor, whose crest I was ashamed to tarnish, I was hard hit, so that I am in danger of dying of the Italian disease."

The lady, horror-struck, shrieked like one in labor, and, being intensely agitated, repulsed him with a very gentle little gesture; Lavallière, finding himself in a most pitiful plight, turned to leave the room; but he had not reached the door-hangings before Marie d'Annebault had glanced at him once more, saying to herself:

"Ah! what a pity!"

Thereupon, she relapsed into profound melancholy, being secretly moved to compassion for the gentleman, and becoming the more enamored of him in that he was fruit thrice forbidden.

"Were it not for Maillé," she said to him one

night when he seemed to her more handsome than usual, "I would take your disease; then would we suffer the same horrors together."

"I love you too well," said the brother-in-arms, "not to be virtuous."

And he left her to go to his fair Limeuil. Doubt not that, as he could not deny himself the pleasure of receiving the lady's burning glances, there was at the hours of eating and during Vespers a sustained fire within them which much inflamed them; but she was constrained to live on without touching the chevalier otherwise than with the glance. By this means was Marie d'Annebault powerfully fortified against the gallants of the court; for there is no more impassable barrier, no better guardian, than love; it is like the devil: that which it holds it encompasses with flames.

One evening, Lavallière, having escorted his friend's wife to a ballet given by Queen Catherine, danced with his fair Limeuil, upon whom he doted. In those days, gallants carried on their amours bravely, two by two, and even in flocks. Now, all the ladies were jealous of La Limeuil, who was at that moment hesitating as to giving herself to the comely Lavallière. Before taking her place for a quadrille, she had given him the sweetest of assignations for the morrow during the royal hunt. Our great Queen Catherine, who, from motives of astute policy, encouraged these amours and stirred them about as pastry-cooks make their fires blaze by poking them, our said queen, then, cast her eye at all

the pretty couples winding in and out in her quadrille for ladies, and said to her husband:

"While they do battle here, can they form leagues against you?—Eh?"

"True, but they of the Religion?"

"Bah! we will catch them, too!" said she, laughing.—"See, there is Lavallière, who is suspected of being of the Huguenots, converted by my dear Limeuil, who progresses not badly for a damsel of sixteen.—He will soon have her in his claws."

"Ah! madame, believe it not," said Marie d'Annebault, "for he is ravaged by the same Italian malady that made you queen!"

At this artless disclosure, Catherine, the fair Diane, and the king, who were together, laughed loud and long, and the story ran from ear to ear. Thereupon, Lavallière was the victim of shame and mockery that knew no end. The poor gentleman, at whom folk pointed their fingers, would have liked another to be in his shoes; for La Limeuil, whom Lavallière's rivals could not quickly enough inform, with sneers, of his danger, assumed the expression of a door-knocker to her lover, so swift was the contagion and so intense the apprehension of that dread disease. Thus, Lavallière found himself shunned on all sides, like a leper. The king addressed him most ungraciously, and the worthy knight left the fête, followed by poor Marie, in despair because of what she had said. She had utterly ruined him she loved, had sullied his honor, and wrecked his life, forasmuch as the physicians

and surgeons declared, as a fact beyond dispute, that persons Italianized by this love-sickness must lose their chief advantages, no longer possess the power of generation, and that their bones would turn black.

Wherefore, no woman chose to allow herself to be touzled, even in lawful wedlock, by the comeliest gentleman in the realm, were he so much as suspected of being one of those whom Master François Rabelais called his "most precious *croûtes-levés.*"

As the good knight spoke little and was buried in melancholy, his companion said to him, as they returned from the Hôtel d'Hercules, where the fête was:

"My dear lord, I have done you a great injury!"

"Ah! madame," replied Lavallière, "mine is reparable, but into what peril you have fallen! Is it meet that you should be aware of the risk attending my love?"

"Oh!" said she, "in that case I may be very sure now of having you all to myself, since in return for this great reprobation and dishonor I shall be forever your friend, your hostess, your lady, aye, more, your servant. It is my will, therefore, to devote myself to wiping out the traces of this shame, and to cure you by incessant care and vigilance; and if they of the profession pronounce that the malady is too deep-seated, that it must cause your death as it caused the deceased king's, then do I lay claim to your company that I may die gloriously, dying of your malady. Ah!" she added, weeping, "there

is no torture to pay for the evil I have brought upon you."

These words were accompanied by great tears; her too-virtuous heart failed her, and she fell in a veritable swoon. Lavallière, in dire dismay, raised her and placed his hand upon her heart, below a breast of unrivalled beauty. The lady revived with the warmth of that loved hand, feeling an agonizing bliss that almost caused her to lose consciousness anew.

"Alas!" she said, "such accursed, superficial caresses will be henceforth the sole joys of our love. And even these are a thousand points above the joys poor Maillé fancied he afforded me. Leave your hand there," she said. "Verily, it is upon my heart and touches it!"

At these words, the gentleman, retaining his piteous expression, artlessly confessed to his lady that he felt such exceeding bliss in that contact that the pains of his malady were much increased, and that death was preferable to such martyrdom.

"Then let us die!" said she.

But the litter was in the courtyard of the palace; and as there were no means of death at hand, they lay apart from each other, heavily laden with love, Lavallière having lost his fair Limeuil, and Marie d'Annebault having gained pleasures beyond parallel.

By this misadventure, entirely unforeseen, Lavallière found himself under the ban in respect both to love and marriage; he dared show himself nowhere,

and he saw that the guardianship of a woman's virtue cost very dear; but the more he expended of honor and virtue, the more pleasure he derived from these great sacrifices offered up to his brotherhood. None the less was his duty very arduous, very thorny, and well-nigh intolerable during the last days of his watch. For this reason:

The avowal of her love, which she believed to be reciprocated, the wrong done by her to her true knight, the knowledge of an unknown pleasure, imparted much audacity to the fair Marie, who relapsed into Platonic love, slightly tempered by the trivial indulgences wherein there was no danger. Thence came the diabolic diversions of the *petite oie*, invented by the ladies who, after the death of King François, dreaded the contagion but wished to belong to their lovers; and Lavallière could in nowise refuse to play his part in the cruel joys of the touch. Thus, every evening, did the grief-stricken Marie attach her guest to her skirts, hold his hands, kiss him with her glances, rub her cheek softly against his; and in this virtuous commerce, wherein the knight was caught like a devil in a holy-water basin, she discoursed to him of her great love, which was without bounds, forasmuch as it soared through the boundless realms of ungratified desires. All the fire which women bring into their material loves, when the night hath no other light than their eyes, she transferred to the mysterious movements of her head, the exultant outbursts of her soul, and the ecstasies of her heart. Thereupon, naturally, and

with the blissful joy of two angels mated in intelligence alone, they intoned in unison the sweet litanies which the lovers of those days were wont to repeat in honor of love, anthems which the Abbé de Thelesme hath saved from oblivion, paragraph by paragraph, by engraving them on the walls of his abbey, located, according to Master Alcofribas, in our province of Chinon, where I have seen them in Latin, and do here translate them for the behoof of Christians.

"Alack!" Marie d'Annebault would say, "thou art my strength and my life, my joy and my treasure!"

"And you," he would reply, "are a pearl, an angel!"

"Thou, my seraph!"

"You, my soul!"

"Thou, my God!"

"You, my morning and evening star, my honor, my beauty, my universe!"

"Thou my great, my divine master!"

"You, my glory, my faith, my religion!"

"Thou, my gentle, my comely, my gallant, my noble, my dear knight, my protector, my king, my love!"

"You, my fairy, the flower of my days, the vision of my nights!"

"Thou, my thought of every moment!"

"You, the joy of my eyes!"

"Thou, the voice of my soul!"

"You, the light of day!"

"Thou, the light of my nights!"

"You, the best beloved of women!"

"Thou, the most adored of men!"

"You, my blood, another better myself!"

"Thou, my heart, my glory!"

"You, my saint, my only joy!"

"I leave thee the palm of love, and great as mine is, I believe that thou dost love me more, for that thou art the lord!"

"No, yours is the palm, my goddess, my Virgin Mary!"

"No, I am thy servant, thy tire-woman, a nothing which thou canst dissolve!"

"Nay, nay, 'tis I who am your slave, your faithful page, of whom you can make use as of a breath of air, upon whom you can walk as upon a carpet. My heart is your throne."

"Nay, dear, for thy voice transfixes me."

"Your glance burns me."

"I see not save through thee."

"I feel not save through you."

"Ah! but place thy hand upon my heart, thy hand alone, then wilt thou see me turn pale when my blood shall have taken on the heat of thine."

And in these contests, their eyes, so ardent already, blazed yet brighter; and the good knight was in some measure accessory to the joy which Marie d'Annebault felt in having that hand upon her heart. Now, as in this slight intercourse all her strength was put forth, all her desires overstrained, all her ideas of the thing intensified, it happened that she swooned often and in good faith. Their eyes shed

scalding tears, they seized each other in a fiery embrace, as the conflagration seizes houses; but that was all! In truth, Lavallière had promised to restore to his friend, safe and sound, the body alone, not the heart.

When Maillé announced his return, it was high time, for no virtue could hold out at this gridiron business; and the less liberty the lovers had, the greater their enjoyment of their imaginary joys.

Leaving Marie d'Annebault, the loyal comrade went as far as Bondy to meet his friend, to assist him to pass through the woods without misadventure; and the two brothers lay together, according to the ancient fashion, in the hamlet of Bondy.

There, as they lay in bed, they narrated to each other, the one the happenings of his journey, the other the gossip of the court, gallant anecdotes, *et cætera*. But Maillé's first question concerned Marie d'Annebault, who, Lavallière pledged his word, was untouched in that precious spot wherein dwells the honor of husbands, wherewith the lovelorn Maillé was well content.

On the morrow, they were all three reunited, to the great vexation of Marie, who, by virtue of the exalted prudence of womankind, fêted her husband royally, but pointed to her heart to Lavallière, with pretty gestures, as if to say: "This is thy property!"

At supper, Lavallière announced his departure for the war. Maillé was deeply grieved at this distressing resolution, and would fain have accompanied his brother; but Lavallière flatly refused.

"Madame," he said to Marie d'Annebault, "I love you more than life, but not more than honor."

And, speaking, he turned pale, and Madame de Maillé turned pale listening, forasmuch as never in their game of the *petite oie* had there been so much true love as in those words. Maillé insisted upon bearing his friend company as far as Meaux. When he returned, he discussed with his wife the unknown and secret reasons of his departure, and Marie, who suspected poor Lavalliere's sorrows, said:

"I know; 'tis because he is too shamefaced here, for all know he hath the *mal de Naples*."

"He!" exclaimed Maillé in amazement. "I saw him when we lay together at Bondy the other night, and last night at Meaux. He hath no disease! He is as sound as your eye!"

The lady melted in tears, admiring this exceeding loyalty, the sublime resignation in his speech, and the nightly suffering of that inward passion. But, as she, too, retained her love in the bottom of her heart, she died when Lavalliere died before Metz, as Monsieur Bourdeilles de Brantôme hath told in his gossiping chronicles.

THE CURÉ OF AZAY-LE-RIDEAU

In those days, the priests took no wife in lawful wedlock, but had concubines as pretty as could be found; which was afterward forbidden by the councils, as everyone knows, because, in very truth, it was not seemly that the private confidences of people should be told to a strumpet who laughed at them, besides the other secret doctrines, ecclesiastical manœuvrings, and speculations which abounded in the matter of exalted Roman policy. The priest who was the last in our province to keep a woman ostentatiously in his vicarage, regaling her with his scholastic love, was a certain curé of Azay-le-Ridel, a most charming spot afterward called Azay-le-Bruslé, now Azay-le-Rideau, of which the castle is one of the wonders of Touraine. Now, those good old times when women did not detest the priest-odor are not so far away as some may think; for there still sat in the episcopal chair of Paris Monsieur d'Orgemont, son of the last bishop, and the fierce quarrels of the Armignacs had not come to an end. To say truth, the said curé did well to have his cure in that age, seeing that he was of lordly stature, high in color, of becoming corpulence, tall and strong, eating and drinking like a convalescent;

and, in sooth, was always recovering from a pleasant malady which seized him in his leisure hours: so that later he would have been his own executioner, if he had attempted to be continent according to the canons. Add to this, that he was a Tourainer, *ergo* dark, and carried in his eyes fire to kindle and water to extinguish all the household ovens which needed to be kindled or extinguished. Wherefore, never has such a curé since been seen at Azay! a handsome curé, erect, red-cheeked, always blessing and neighing; much preferring weddings and baptisms to deaths; a jovial blade, pious in church, a man everywhere. There have been many curés, indeed, who have been good eaters and hard drinkers; others who have blessed well, and some who have much neighed; but, all together, they would hardly equal the power of this said curé in all respects: and he alone did worthily fill his parish with benedictions, maintain it in cheerfulness, and comfort the afflicted, all to such good purpose, that no one ever saw him leave his house without longing to take him into their entrails, so beloved he was. He it was who first said in a sermon that the devil was not so black as he was painted, and who, for Madame de Candé, transformed partridges into fishes, saying that perch of the Indre were river partridges, and, conversely, the partridges were perch of the air. Nor ever dealt blows hidden in the shadow of morality; and many a time said jestingly that he would rather lie in a good bed than on a Testament; that God had supplied himself with everything and had need of naught.

In respect to the poor and others, they who came to seek wool at his vicarage never went away shorn, forasmuch as he had his hand always in his pocket, and softened—he who was so rigid in other respects!—at the sight of all miseries and infirmities, and stooped to pour balm into all sores. So that pleasant tales were long told concerning this king of curés! He it was who caused so much merriment at the nuptials of the lord of Valesnes, near Sacché. How the mother of the said lord meddled a little with the food, baked meats and other dishes which were so abundant that they could have fed the greater part of a village at least; but, to tell the truth, people came to those nuptials from Montbazon, Tours, Chinon, Langeais, and everywhere, and for a whole week.

Now, the good curé, returning to the hall where the company was making merry, met a little scullery-boy, who came to inform madame that all the elementary substances and rich rudiments, juices, and sauces were prepared for a pudding of superior quality of which she proposed to oversee the secret compounding, mixing, and manipulation, with the view of regaling therewith the bride's kindred. My said curé gently boxed the ears of the spoil-sauce, telling him that he was too filthy to show himself to persons of high condition, and that he would deliver the said message. And thereupon the droll fellow opens the door, makes a circle with his left hand after the manner of a sheath, and into this circle deftly thrusts the middle finger of his right hand

several times; and, while doing thus, glances knowingly at the lady of Valesnes. saying: "Come, all is prepared!"—They who were not in the secret roared with laughter when they saw madame rise and go to the curé, for she knew that he referred to the pudding and not to that which the others thought.

But a true story is that of the way in which this worthy pastor lost his mate, to whom the metropolitan allowed no successor; but, for all that, the said curé did not lack household utensils. In his parish, one and all deemed it an honor to lend him theirs; the more as he was a man who spoiled nothing and who was very careful to cleanse them thoroughly, the dear man! But this is the story. One evening, the good curé went home to supper, with a face as melancholy as could be, because he had put under the ground a worthy farmer who had died in a strange fashion of which the people of Azay often speak to this day. Seeing that he ate only with the ends of his teeth, and found a bitter taste in a savory dish of chitterlings which had been cunningly prepared under her eye, his goodwoman said to him:

"Have you passed before the usurer, pray"—see MASTER CORNELIUS, *passim*,—"met two crows, or seen the dead man move in his grave, that you are thus undone?"

"Ho! ho!"

"Have you been deceived?"

"Ha! ha!"

"Tell me, in God's name!"

"My love, I am still all in a maze because of poor Cochegrue, and there's not a good housewife's tongue or virtuous cuckold's lips within twenty leagues, but is talking of it."

"What is the story?"

"Listen. Honest Cochegrue was returning from market, having sold his grain and two shoats. He rode his pretty mare, which, beyond Azay, began to feel amorous, without his having the least suspicion thereof; and poor Cochegrue trotted on and on, counting his gains. Lo! at the corner of the old road to the Landes de Charlemagne, a stallion whom Sieur de la Carte pastures in a vineyard, to procure a fine crop of horses, forasmuch as the said stallion is well built for the race-course, as handsome as an abbé can be, tall and powerful, so that Monsieur l'Amiral came to see him and said that he was a beast of noble stock; well, this devil of a horse scents the pretty mare and plays the sly fox, neither neighs nor says any equine periphrases; but when she is near the road, leaps forty chains of vines, runs up stamping with his four hoofs, begins the volleys of a lover who pines for closer intercourse, emits ringing neighs to make the boldest dribble vinegar, and so loud, that they of Champy heard him and feared greatly. Cochegrue, misdoubting the peril, rides for the Landes, spurs his lustful mare and trusts to her swift flight; and, in sooth, the good mare listens, obeys, and flies, flies like a bird; but within a bow-shot the great rake of a

horse follows, pounding the earth with his feet like farriers beating iron; and, putting forth all his strength, his mane flying in the wind, makes answer to the pretty pattering of the mare's swift gallop with his terrible patapan! patapan!—With that, the good farmer, feeling death come nearer with the beast's passion, spurred his mare and the mare ran faster; at last, Cochegrue, pale and half-dead, reaches the great courtyard of his farm; but finding the door of his stables locked, cries: 'Help! help! wife!'—Then he rides, rides around his pond, thinking thus to avoid the accursed horse, whose love was burning, who was in a frenzy, and whose passion waxed fiercer with the wild pursuit of the mare. All his people, terrified by the danger, dared not go to open the stable-door, fearing the strange embrace and the kicks of the iron-shod lover. At last, La Cochegrue went, but at the door through which the good mare was rushing the damned horse attacked her, grasped her, gave her his fierce greeting, embraced her with his two legs, squeezed her, pinched her, touzled her; and during the mêlée so crushed and kneaded Cochegrue that naught was found of him save a shapeless mass, collapsed like a walnut after the oil is squeezed out. It was a sorry sight to see him crushed alive, and mingling his groans with the horse's deep sighs of love."

"Oh! the mare," cried the curé's wench.

"What?" exclaimed the good priest in amazement.

"To be sure! You men would not do as much as burst a plum—"

"'Sdeath!" rejoined the curé, "you reproach me without reason!"

The excellent husband threw her in wrath on the bed; and plied his stiletto so roughly that she burst on the spot, all torn to pieces; then died, nor could physicians or surgeons say by what means the solution of continuity occurred, so thoroughly ruptured were the joints and medial partitions. Doubt not that he was a stalwart man, a fine curé, as hath been said above.

The excellent people of the neighborhood, even the women, agreed that he had not done wrong, and that he had acted within his rights. Thence, perhaps, the proverb so often repeated in those days: "*Que l'aze le saille!*" Which proverb is even more obscene than as I, out of regard for the ladies, do set it down.

But this great and noble curé was great in other ways than this, and before this misadventure he performed such a feat that no robbers ever dared thereafter to ask him if he had gold in his pocket, even though there had been twenty of them and more to attack him. One evening, when he still had his goodwoman, after supper, when he had done full justice to the goose, the wench, the wine, and all, and sat in his chair reflecting where he should have a new granary built for the tithes, there came a message from the lord of Sacché, who was dying and wished to make his peace with God, to receive the sacrament and to go through all the other ceremonies which you know.

"He is a good man and loyal nobleman, I will go!" he said.

Thereupon, he goes to his church, takes the silver box in which are the consecrated wafers, rings his little bell himself in order not to arouse his clerk, and goes softly, with a brave heart, along the roads. Near the Gué-Droit, which is a stream that flows into the Indre through the fields, my good curé spies a *malandrin*. And what is a *malandrin?* A clerk of Saint Nicholas. And what is that? One who sees clearly in the dark, educates himself by ransacking purses and turning them inside out, and takes his degrees on the high-roads. Do you understand? This *malandrin*, then, was waiting for the box, which he knew to be of very great price.

"Oho!" said the priest, laying the pyx on the stones of the bridge, "do you stay there without budging."

Then he advanced on the robber, tripped up his heels, snatched his iron-shod club, and when the villain rose to struggle with him disembowelled him with a well-aimed blow at the trap-doors of the belly.

Then he picked up the viaticum, saying to it bluntly:

"Hein! if I had trusted in thy providence, we should both be melted down!"

But to utter this impiety on the high-road to Sacché was like putting shoes on grasshoppers, seeing that he said it, not to God, but to the Archbishop of Tours, who had rebuked him roundly,

threatened him with interdict, and admonished him in the Chapter for having said in the pulpit for the behoof of lazy folk that harvests did not come by the favor of God but by honest labor and great pains: which doctrine smelt of the stake. And, in truth, he was wrong, for that the fruits of the earth have need of one another; but he died in this heresy, for he could never understand that harvests could come without the pickaxe, even if it were God's pleasure; a doctrine which scholars have proved to be true, by demonstrating that grain hath never thriven without man.

I will not leave this perfect model of a pastor without setting down here one of the incidents of his life, which proves with how great fervor he imitated the saints in the distribution of their wealth and their cloaks, which they gave to the poor and the wayfarer. One day, he was returning from Tours after making his reverence to his superior, and fared toward Azay, mounted on his mule. On the road, not far from Ballan, he overtook a lovely girl who was on foot, and was distressed to see her travelling like the dogs, the more as she was visibly fatigued, and lifted her hind-quarters with reluctance. Thereupon, he hailed her softly, and the pretty girl turned and stopped. The good priest, who was well-skilled in not frightening young fawns, especially of the female gender, urged her so courteously and with so kindly an air, to ride *en croupe* on the mule, that the girl mounted, not without some drawing back and simpering, as they all do

when one invites them to eat or to take whatever they will. The lamb duly mounted with the shepherd, the mule went on at its mule's pace; and the girl slipped this way and that way, swaying from side to side so awkwardly that the curé remarked to her, as they left Ballan, that she would do better to cling to him; and the fair girl straightway crossed her plump arms on her cavalier's breast, though almost afraid to venture.

"There! do you still toss about? Are you comfortable?" queried the curé.

"Faith! yes, I am comfortable.—And you?"

"I am something more," said the priest.

And, in truth, he was well content, and was soon agreeably warmed in the back by two tangents which rubbed against it, and in due time seemed inclined to leave their imprint on his shoulder-blades, which would have been a pity, since that is not the place for such fair and beauteous wares. Little by little the motion of the mule put the inward warmth of the two worthy cavaliers in communication, and made their blood flow more quickly in that it had the motion of the mule in addition to its own; and thus the girl and the curé ended by knowing each other's thoughts, but not those of the mule. Then, when each had become acclimated, the man to the woman, the woman to the man, they felt an internal commotion which resolved itself into secret desires.

"Hein!" said the curé, turning to his companion, "yonder is a fine bit of wood which hath grown very dense."

"'Tis too near the road," the girl replied. "The bad boys will cut the branches, or the cows eat the young shoots."

"And are you not married?" asked the curé, urging the mule to a trot once more.

"No," said she.

"Not at all?"

"Faith! no."

"Why! 'tis shameful at your age."

"Indeed, yes, monsieur; but, you see, a poor girl who hath borne a child is very bad cattle."

Thereupon, the good curé, taking pity upon this ignorance, and knowing that the canons said, among other things, that pastors should give instruction to their flocks, and point out to them their duties and their burdens in this life, deemed that he should fitly perform his office by giving this lamb to know the burden she would have some day to bear. Therefore he softly begged her not to be afraid, and said that, if she would trust in his loyalty, never would anyone have knowledge of the trial of the stepping-stones of marriage which he proposed to her to make straightway; and as, since passing Ballan, the girl had thought of naught else, as her longing had been carefully sustained by the beast's heating motion, she answered the curé bluntly:

"If you talk so, I shall get down."

Thereupon, the good curé persisted in his soft petitions to such good purpose, that, when they reached the wood of Azay, the girl would fain dismount, and be sure that the priest lifted her down,

for he had need to be otherwise mounted to finish this discussion. But the virtuous girl ran into the thickest part of the wood to escape the curé, crying:

"Ah! you wicked man, you shall not know where I am."

The mule having reached a clearing where the grass was rich and plentiful, the girl stumbled over a blade of grass and blushed. The curé went to her; and there, as he had rung the bell for mass, he said it; and both took a large instalment on account of the joys of paradise. The worthy priest had it at heart to instruct her fully, and found his pupil very docile, as soft of heart as of skin, a veritable jewel. Wherefore, he much grieved to have made the lesson so short by giving it so near Azay, seeing that it would be very easy to repeat it, as all the teachers do, who tell their pupils the same things many times.

"Ah! my sweet," cried the goodman, "prithee, why didst thou fiddle-faddle so long that we came to terms only on the borders of Azay?"

"Oh! I am from Ballan," said she.

To make my story short, I will tell you that, when this excellent curé died in his parish, there came many people, children and others, in tears, despairing, distressed, grieving bitterly, and all said:

"Ah! we have lost our father!"

And the maids, widows, married women, and little girls looked at one another, regretting him more deeply than any lover, and all said:

"He was much more than a priest, he was a man!"

The seed of such curés is borne on the wind, and will never germinate again for all the seminaries.

Even the poor to whom his savings were bequeathed found that they were losers none the less. And one old cripple whom he had assisted bellowed in the courtyard: "I shall not die, alas!" meaning to say: "Why did not death take me in his place?"—Which made some laugh; whereat the good curé's shade could not have been wroth.

THE APOSTROPHE

The fair laundress of Portillon-lez-Tours, of whom one droll saying hath been heretofore set down in this book, was a damsel endowed with so much cunning that she must needs have stolen that of six priests or of three women at the least reckoning. So that she did not lack becurled darlings, and had so many of them that you would have said, seeing them about her, that they were bees seeking to return to their hive at night. An old silk-dyer who lived on Rue Montfumier and possessed there a house scandalous in its splendor, coming from his vineyard of La Grenadière, situated on the pretty hillside of Saint-Cyr, rode through Portillon on horseback to reach the bridge of Tours. Thereupon, as it was a warm evening, he was inflamed by a mad desire when he saw the fair laundress seated on her doorstep. Now, as he had long dreamed of this merry maiden, his mind was made up to make her his wife; and soon, from being a laundress, she became a dyeress, a good bourgeoise of Tours, having laces, fine linen, furniture in abundance, and was happy, notwithstanding the dyer, seeing that she understood very well how to curry him. The worthy dyer had for gossip a

maker of silk-looms, who was short of stature, hunchbacked for life, and full of wickedness. And on the wedding-day he said to the dyer:

"Thou hast done well to marry, gossip; we shall have a pretty wife."

And a thousand sly jests such as it is customary to say to bridegrooms.

But the said hunchback did, in very truth, pay court to the dyeress, who, being by nature little disposed to love ill-formed men, laughed at the loom-maker's suit, and joked him freely concerning the springs, machines, and other inventions, of which his shop was too full. However, the great love of the said hunchback recoiled at nothing, and became so exceeding burdensome to the dyeress that she resolved to cure him by many a cruel trick. One evening, after a never-ending persecution, she bade her lover come to the small door of the house, and that, toward midnight, she would open all the entrances to him. Now, observe that it was a fine winter's night; Rue Montfumier runs to the Loire, and in that bourgeois nook, even in summer, howl winds as sharp as a hundred needles. The worthy hunchback, well swaddled in his cloak, failed not to come, and walked to and fro to keep warm, awaiting the hour. About midnight, he was half frozen, stormed like thirty-two devils caught in a stole, and was about to renounce his happiness when a faint light streamed through the cracks of the windows and descended to the little door.

"Ah! 'tis she!" he said.

And that hope warmed him anew. With that he glued his ear to the door and heard a soft voice.

"Are you there?" said the dyer's wife.

"Yes."

"Cough, that I may know—"

The hunchback began to cough.

"'Tis not you."

Thereupon, the hunchback said aloud:

"How now! not I? do you not know my voice? Open!"

"Who's there?" demanded the dyer, opening his window.

"Alas! you have wakened my husband, who returned to-night, unlooked for, from Amboise."

At this point, the dyer, who saw in the moonlight a man at his door, threw a good potful of cold water upon him, and shouted: "Thieves!" so that the hunchback was fain to fly; but, in his fright, he jumped too low over the chain stretched at the end of the street and fell into the filthy hole which the sheriffs at that time had not as yet replaced by a ditch to discharge the filth into the Loire. In this bath the loom-maker thought to die, and cursed La Belle Tascherette—for so, her husband being named Taschereau, did the good people of Tours call his pretty wife, endearingly.

Carandas—such was the name of the maker of machines to weave, spin, reel, and wind silks—was not sufficiently in love to believe in the dyeress's innocence, and swore an oath of deadly hatred against her. But, some days later, having

recovered from his dip in the dyers' drain, he came to sup with his gossip. On that occasion, the dyer's wife reasoned so well, put so much honey into a few words, and dazzled him with such fair promises, that he no longer had any suspicions. He asked for a new assignation, and La Belle Tascherette, with the face of a woman absorbed by such matters, said to him:

"Come to-morrow at night. My husband will remain three days at Chenonceaux. The queen would have some old stuffs dyed, and will discuss the colors with him; 'twill be a long affair."

Carandas donned his best clothes, failed not to appear at the appointed hour, and found a gallant supper: lamprey, Vouvray wine, linen of dazzling whiteness, for the dyer's wife needed no lessons in the matter of washing; and all was so well prepared that it was pleasant to see the dishes of spotless pewter, to smell the savory odor of the meats, and a thousand nameless things about the room to look upon, and La Tascherette, nimble and blooming and appetizing as an apple on a day of great heat. Now, the machinist, overheated by these glowing prospects, would straightway have assailed the dyeress, when Master Taschereau knocked loudly on the street door.

"God ha' mercy!" said La Portillone, "what hath happened?—Bestow yourself in yonder chest!—For I have been abused on your account; and if my husband should find you, he is capable of doing away with you, so violent is he in his wrath."

And she forthwith forced the hunchback into the chest, took the key, and ran quickly to her good husband, who she well knew was to return from Chenonceaux to supper. Then was the dyer warmly kissed on his two eyes and his two ears; and he, likewise, greeted his dear wife with loud nurse's kisses which resounded all about. Then the husband and wife seated themselves at table, supped merrily, and went at last to bed, and the machinist heard all, being compelled to stand upright and not to cough or make the slightest movement. He was in the midst of linen, like a sardine packed in a can, and had no more air than the barbels have of sunlight at the bottom of the sea; but he had for his diversion the music of love, the sighs of the dyer, and the pretty ejaculations of La Tascherette. At last, when he believed that his gossip was asleep, the hunchback essayed to pick the lock of the chest.

"Who is there?" said the dyer.

"What is the matter, dear?" replied his wife, putting her nose above the coverlet.

"I hear scratching," said the goodman.

"'Tis the cat, we shall have rain to-morrow," replied his wife.

The worthy husband replaced his head on the pillow, after being gently chided by the dyeress.

"Fie! my son, your sleep is very light. Ah! one must not think of trying to make of you a husband of good stock. La! la! be a good man! Oh! oh! papa mine, thy cap is all awry. Come! put on thy cap again, my little darling, for one must be comely,

even when asleep. There! now are you comfortable?"

"Yes."

"Are you asleep?" she asked, kissing him.

"Yes."

In the morning the dyer's lovely wife stole softly to the chest and released the machinist, who was paler than a dead man.

"Oh! air! air!" he exclaimed.

And he fled, cured of his love, but carrying away as much hate in his heart as a pocket can contain of black wheat. The said hunchback quitted Tours and betook himself to the city of Bruges, whither some merchants had urged him to come and set up machines for making coats of mail. During his long absence, Carandas, who had Moorish blood in his veins, for he was descended from a Saracen left for dead in the great battle fought between the Moors and the French in the commune of Ballan,—mentioned in the preceding Tale,—in which place are the so-called Landes de Charlemagne, whereon naught grows, for that evil-doers and persons accursed are buried there, and the grass thereof damns even the very cows; wherefore this Carandas neither rose nor went to bed in this strange land without thinking how he could feed his longing for vengeance, and he dreamed always thereof, and would scarce be content with less than the death of the fair laundress of Portillon, and said to himself many times:

"I would eat her flesh. 'Sdeath! I would have

one of her breasts cooked and swallow it even without sauce."

His was a hate of good crimson dye, a cardinal hate, the hate of a wasp or an old maid; aye, all known hates were blended in one single hate, which boiled and steamed and was resolved into an elixir of gall, of wicked and devilish sentiments, heated in the blaze of the hottest brands of hell; in a word, 'twas a master hate.

Now, one fine day, the said Carandas returned to Touraine with many a gold piece which he brought from the land of Flanders, where he had trafficked in his mechanical secrets. He bought a fine house on Rue Montfumier, which may still be seen, and arouses the wonder of passers-by, for the reason that there be divers very curious rounded humps on the stones in the wall. Carandas the hater found some most notable changes in the household of his gossip the dyer, forasmuch as the goodman had two pretty children, who, as it happened, bore no manner of resemblance to the mother or to the father; but as children must needs resemble someone, there be some crafty folk who seek the features of their ancestors, when well-favored, the little flatterers! And so the worthy husband found that his two boys resembled an uncle of his own, formerly a priest at Notre-Dame d'Esgrignolles; but, in the eyes of certain waggish spirits, the two brats were the living images of a comely ecclesiastic, officiating at Notre-Dame-la-Riche, a famous church between Tours and Plessis. Now, be sure of one thing and fix it

in your mind; and even though, in this book, you have nibbled, taken to yourself, extracted naught besides this essence of all truth, deem yourself most fortunate none the less: *videlicet*, that man will never be able to do without a nose, *id est*, that man will always be dirty-nosed, that is to say, will always continue to be man, and thus will continue through all ages to come to laugh and drink, to find himself in his shirt without being the better or the worse therefor, and will have the same occupations; but these preparatory thoughts are intended to fix it more firmly in your understanding, that this mind on two legs will always believe to be true the things that flatter his passions, caress his hates, and serve his amours: thence, logic! By this means, it came to pass that on the first day when the aforesaid Carandas saw his gossip's children, saw the comely priest, saw the dyer's beauteous wife, saw Taschereau, all seated at table, and saw, to his own disadvantage, the finest slice of the lamprey given with a certain air by La Tascherette to her friend the priest, the machinist said to himself:

"My gossip is a cuckold, his wife lies with the little confessor, the children were made with his holy water, and I will show them that hunchbacks have something more than other men."

And that was true, as 'tis true that Tours hath ever had and will ever have its feet in the Loire, like unto a pretty girl bathing and sporting with the water, lashing the waves, *flic-flac*, with her white hands, for the town is a laughing, capering, amorous,

buxom, blooming town, of sweeter perfume than all other towns in the world, which are not worthy to so much as comb her hair nor to fasten her girdle. And doubt not, if you go thither, that you will find in its centre a charming girdle-like band, a beautiful street where everybody strolls, where there is wind, sunlight and shadow, rain and love. Ha! ha! laugh, I say, go thither, I say! 'Tis a street ever new, ever regal, ever imperial, a patriotic street, a street with two sidewalks, a street open at both ends, straight as an arrow, a street so wide that no one there hath ever cried: "Look out!" a street which doth not wear out, a street which leads to the abbey of Grand-Mont and to a ditch which runs close beside the bridge, and at the end of which is a fine fair-ground; a street well-paved, well-made, well-washed, clean as a mirror, populous, silent at certain hours, coquettish, well capped at night by its dainty blue roofs; in a word, 'tis a street wherein I was born, 'tis the queen of streets, always between earth and sky, a fountained street, a street which lacks nothing to be famous among streets! And, in very truth, 'tis the true street, the only street of Tours. If others there be, they are dark, winding, narrow, damp, and come, one and all, to salute with respect this noble street which doth command them. Where am I? for, once in that street, no one can go forth therefrom, so pleasant it is. But I owe this filial homage, this descriptive hymn, which comes from my heart, to my natal street, whose corners lack naught save the noble faces of my dear Master

Rabelais and Sieur Descartes, who are unknown to the natives of the province.

And so the said Carandas was, on his return from Flanders, fêted by his gossip and by all those who loved him for his jests, quips, and amusing sayings. The worthy hunchback seemed delivered of his former passion, made friendly advances to La Taschérette and the priest, kissed the children, and, when he was alone with the dyer's wife, recalled the night of the chest and the night of the drain, saying:

"Hein! how you made sport of me!"

"'Twas your fault," she replied, laughing. "Had you, by reason of your great love, allowed yourself to be ridiculed, deceived, made fun of but a brief space more, you might, perchance, have toyed with me like all the rest!"

Thereupon, Carandas laughed, raging inwardly. Then, spying the chest wherein he had well-nigh breathed his last, his wrath became the hotter, for that the fair dyeress had grown fairer like all those who renew their youth in the waters of *Jouvence*, which are none other than the well-springs of love. The machinist studied the procedure of cuckoldry in his gossip's household in order to avenge himself: for there are as many different varieties of love as there are houses, and, although all amours resemble one another in the same sense that all men resemble one another, it is proved to the content of those who seek the truth that, for the happiness of women, each amour hath its special features, and that, whereas nothing is so like one man as

another man, it is as true that nothing differs more from one man than another man. There you have what confuses everything or explains the thousand fancies of women, who seek the best of men with pains and pleasures innumerable, more of the first than of the last.

But how abuse them for their strivings, changes, and contradictory views? Consider! Nature doth ever trifle, veer, and turn about, and you would have a woman remain in one place! Know you if ice is really cold? No. Nor do you know whether cuckoldry is not a lucky accident, productive of brains well-stocked and better fashioned than any others. Wherefore seek something better than flatulence under the sun. This will serve to inflate the philosophic reputation of this eccentric book. Yes, yes, I say, the man who cries: "Here's death to rats!" is more advanced than those intent on tying up Nature, forasmuch as she is a proud jade, most capricious, and who lets herself be seen only when she pleases. Do you understand? Thus it is that in all tongues she is of the feminine gender, as a thing essentially fickle, fertile, and fruitful in artful wiles.

And so Carandas ere long discovered that, of all cuckoldry, the most judicious and most discreet was the cuckoldry ecclesiastical. Now, this is how the worthy dyeress had laid her plans. She always set out for her vineyard at La Grenadière-les-Saint-Cyr on Saturday, leaving her excellent husband to finish his week's work, foot up and verify his

accounts, and pay his workmen; then Taschereau would join her on the Sunday in the morning, and would find a good breakfast and his good wife in high spirits; and always brought the priest with him. But the damned priest crossed the Loire in a boat the night before, to go and keep the dyer's wife warm and to calm her excited imagination, that she might sleep well during the night, a task in which young men are most expert. Then the comely curber of imaginations returned in the morning to his house at the hour when Taschereau came to fetch him to La Grenadière for his diversion, and the cuckold always found the priest in his bed. As the boatman was well paid, nobody knew of this game, for the lover passed through the town only after dark on Saturday and very early Sunday morning. When Carandas had made sure of the scheme and regular practice of this gallant procedure, he awaited a day when the two lovers should come together, hungering for each other, after some accidental fasting. Such a meeting soon took place, and the inquisitive hunchback observed the action of the boatman, waiting at the foot of the bank near the Saint Anne canal, for the return of the said priest, who was a fair-haired youth, very sprightly, graceful of figure, like the gallant and coward hero of love of whom Messire Ariosto sings. Thereupon, the machinist sought out the old dyer, who still loved his wife and believed himself to be the only one who put his finger in her pretty receptacle for holy water.

"Ah! *bonsoir*, gossip," said Carandas to Taschereau.

Taschereau whisked off his nightcap.

Thereupon, the machinist tells him of the secret merrymakings of love, pours forth words of all sorts, and stings the dyer on every side.

At last, seeing that he was ready to kill his wife and the priest, Carandas said to him:

"My good neighbor, I brought from Flanders a poisoned sword, which kills instanter, if only it makes a scratch; so, as soon as you have touched your strumpet and her concubine therewith, they will die."

"Let us go and fetch it," cried the dyer.

With that the two tradesmen went off in hot haste to the hunchback's abode to get the sword and hasten to the country.

"But shall we find them in bed?" said Taschereau.

"We will wait," said the hunchback, making sport of his gossip.

But the cuckold had not the cruel torture of awaiting the joy of the two lovers. The dyer's pretty wife and her beloved were busily engaged in catching, in the charming snare which you know, the sweet bird which constantly escapes; and laughed, and tried again, and laughed again.

"Ah! my love," said La Tascherette, squeezing him as if she would engrave him on her stomach, "I love thee so well that I would fain eat thee. No, not that. 'Twould be even better to have thee in my skin, so that thou shouldst never leave me."

"I would 'twere so," the priest replied; "but I cannot be in thy skin all at once; thou must be content to have me in instalments."

It was at this sweet moment that the husband entered with drawn sword uplifted. His lovely wife, to whom her man's face was well known, saw that it was all over with her friend the priest. But of a sudden she rushed toward the goodman, half-naked, her hair flying, lovely with shame, more lovely with love, and said to him:

"Back, wretch, thou art about to slay the father of thy children!"

Whereat the worthy dyer, blinded by the paternal majesty of cuckoldom, and, perchance, by the flame that shot from his wife's eyes, let fall the sword upon the foot of the hunchback who followed him, and so killed him.

This teaches us not to cherish hatred.

EPILOGUE

Here endeth the first ten of these Tales, a mirthful specimen of the works of the comic muse born long ago in our province of Touraine, who is a goodly wench and knows by heart the fine saying of her friend Verville, set down in the MOYEN DE PARVENIR: *One need only be bold to obtain favors.* Alas! sweet madcap, go back to bed, sleep, thou art breathless from thy race; perchance thou hast been beyond the present time. Therefore, wipe thy dainty, naked feet, close thy ears, and return to love. If thou dost dream of other poems woven of merry laughter, to complete these droll fancies, thou shouldst not listen to the absurd clamors and insults of those who, hearing a joyous Gallic lark sing, will say: "Ah! the vile bird!"

SECOND TEN

PROLOGUE

Some persons have rebuked the author for knowing no more of the language of ancient times than a hare knows of making fagots. Of old, such persons would have been called, in good faith, cannibals, Greeks, sycophants, aye, even spawn of the good city of Gomorrha. But the author consents to spare them these pretty flowers of antique criticism, he is content not to wish to be in their skin, forasmuch as he would feel a shame and disesteem of himself and would deem himself the basest of wretched scribblers thus to calumniate a poor book which lies in the path of no paper-smearer of these days. Oh! evil-minded folk, you throw out of window a load of precious bile whereof you might make better use among yourselves! The author consoles himself for his inability to please all, by reflecting that an old Tourainer, of unfading memory, was subjected to such contumely from varlets of the same kidney that they wore out his patience, and that *he had*—as he saith in one of his prologues—*contemplated not writing another line*. Other times, other manners. Nothing suffers metamorphosis, neither God above nor men below. Therefore hath the author plied his spade anew, laughing and relying upon the

future for the reward of his cruel labors. And of a surety it is a cruel labor to excogitate ONE HUNDRED DROLL TALES, seeing that, after having endured the fire of the blackguards and the envious, even that of his friends hath not been lacking, who have come in an evil hour, saying: "Are you mad? Can you think of it? hath man ever had in the pouch of his imagination a hundred such tales? Lay aside the hyperbolical label of your wares, my good fellow! You will never reach the end!"— These are not misanthropes, nor cannibals; as to ruffians, I know not; but of a surety they are very excellent friends, of the sort who have the courage to spread out a thousand harsh judgments through the whole of life, are sharp and rasping as curry-combs on the pretext that they place themselves at your service, in faith and purse and person, in the enormous trials of the said life, and disclose all their value only at the hour of extreme unction. If such people would but confine themselves to such pleasant attentions! but no. When their fears are proved groundless, then do they say triumphantly: "Ha! ha! I knew it! I predicted as much!"

To the end that he may not discourage noble sentiments, even though they be intolerable, the author bequeaths to his friends his old open-work slippers, and gives them for their consolation the assurance that he hath, in fee simple, exempt from execution, in nature's reservoir in the folds of the brain seventy pretty Tales. *Vrai Dieu!* fine threads of understanding, well bedecked with phrases, carefully

supplied with sudden transformations, amply clad in comicalities all new, woven upon the diurnal, nocturnal loom, not devoid of warp and woof, at which the human race works every minute, every hour, every week, month, and year of the great ecclesiastical calendar, begun at a time when the sun could not see and when the moon waited until somebody should point out its road. These seventy subjects, which he gives you full license to call wretched subjects, full of tricks, impudence, obscenity, thieving, gambling, night-walking, being added to the two Tens now completed, make, by Mahomet's belly! a trifling instalment of the said hundred tales. And were it not an unpropitious season for *bibliopoles*, *bibliophiles*, *bibliomanes*, *bibliographes*, and *bibliothecques*, which calls a halt on *bibliophagy*, he would have poured them all out in one bumper, and not drop by drop, as if he were afflicted by a stricture of the brain. This infirmity can, *per Braguettam*, in nowise be suspected in him, seeing that he often gives good weight, putting more than one tale under a single title, as is fully proved by several of this Ten. Be sure, too, that he hath chosen, for the concluding tales, the best and most ribald of them all, to the end that he may not be accused of senile deterioration. Mingle more friendship in your hatreds, therefore, and less hatred in your friendships. Now, utterly forgetting the avaricious stinginess of Nature in the matter of good story-tellers, who number not more than seven perfect ones in the whole ocean of human scribblers,

others, likewise friends, have been of opinion that at a time when everybody goes about clothed in black, as in mourning for something, there was need to concoct works wearisomely solemn or solemnly wearisome; that no writer could live henceforth save by quartering his mind in stately edifices, and that they who had not the art to rebuild the cathedrals and castles of which no stone, no bit of cement moves from its place, would die as unknown as the Pope's slippers. These friends were called upon to declare which they preferred, a pint of good wine or a cask of small beer; a diamond of twenty-two carats or a hundred-pound stone; Hans Carvel's Ring as told by Rabelais, or a modern story told in puling fashion by a schoolboy? They stood abashed and sheepish, and the author said to them, without anger: "Do you understand, good people? Now return to your vines!"

But it is fitting to add this for all others:—The goodman to whom we owe fables and tales of undying authority hath simply used his tools upon them, having stolen the matter from another; but the handiwork put forth upon these insignificant figures hath clothed them with a high value; and although he was, like Ariosto, abused for thinking of merry conceits and trifles, a certain insect, engraved by him, hath since been transformed into a monument of more certain perennity than that of the most solidly constructed works of masonry. In the special jurisprudence of the *Gay-Scavoir*, it is the custom to esteem more highly a leaf extorted

from the entrails of Nature and Truth than all the vapid volumes from which, however beautiful they may be, you could never extract a laugh nor a tear. The author is at liberty to say this without incongruity, forasmuch as he hath no purpose to stand upon tiptoe in order to attain a supernatural height, but because herein is involved the majesty of art and not of himself, a paltry clerk whose merit is to have ink in his inkhorn, to listen to messieurs of the court, and to transcribe the sayings of everyone in this report. His the manual part only, Nature's the rest, forasmuch as, from the Venus of Monsieur Phidias, the Athenian, down to little goodman Godenot, called Sieur Breloque, curiously elaborated by one of the famous authors of the day, everything is studied from the never-changing model of human imitations, which belongs to all. In this praiseworthy trade, happy be the thieves! they are not hanged, but esteemed and beloved! But he is a triple fool, aye, a fool with ten horns on his head, who puffs and struts and boasts of an advantage due to the hazard of complexions, for glory lies solely in the cultivation of the faculties, and in patience and courage.

As for the little flute-like voices and dainty lips of those who have come and lamented prettily in the author's ear the having torn their hair and spoiled their skirts in certain spots, to them he will say: "Why went you thither?"—To these things he is constrained, by the extraordinary villainy of some persons, to add a warning to the kindly-disposed, to

the end that they may use it to put an end to the calumnies of the aforementioned wretched scribblers in his regard.

These Droll Tales were written, according to all authority, during the time when Queen Catherine, of the House of Medici, was in her prime and had a goodly share in reigning, since she meddled constantly in political affairs, to the profit of our holy religion. Which time seized many people by the throat, from our defunct master Françis, first of the name, down to the Estates of Blois, where fell Monsieur de Guise. Now, the schoolboys who play at pitch-farthing know that, in that age of appeals to arms, pacifications, and disturbances, the French language was somewhat disturbed likewise, in view of the inventions of each poet who, in those times as in these, would fain make a language for himself alone, in addition to the outlandish words, Greek, Latin, Italian, German, Swiss, phrases from over-sea, and Spanish jargon brought hither by foreigners, so that a poor scribbler hath his elbows free in this Babel-like tongue, into which Messieurs de Balzac, Blaise Pascal, Furetière, Mesnage, Saint-Evrémond, Malherbe, and others have since brought order, who first swept the French language clean, put shame upon foreign words, and bestowed the right of citizenship on legitimate words in good use and known to all, whereat Sieur Ronsard was abashed.

Having said his say, the author returns to his lady and wishes joys innumerable to them of whom he is beloved; to all others, nuts for crows in their degree.

When the swallows fly away, he will return, not without the third and fourth Tens, which he doth hereby promise to the Pantagruelists, roystering blades, and dandies of all stations, who mislike the elegies, meditations, and melancholy productions of bilious writers.

THE THREE CLERKS OF SAINT NICHOLAS

The inn of the *Trois Barbeaulx* was formerly the place where the best cheer in all Tours was to be had, and the landlord, who bore the name of a past-master in the art, went as far as Châtellerault, Loches, Vendôme, and Blois to cook wedding-banquets. The said landiord, an old trooper unexcelled in his trade, never lighted his lamp by day, could skin a flint, sold hair, skin, and feathers, had an eye to everything, was not easily cozened into taking his pay in monkey's coin, and for a sou lacking in the settlement would have insulted anyone, even a prince. For the rest, a jovial companion, always laughing and drinking with the great topers, always cap in hand before people supplied with plenary indulgences in the form of *Sit Nomen Domini Benedictum*, urging them to spend and proving to them at need, by wise words, that wines were dear; that, do what one would, as nothing was given away in Touraine, one must needs buy everything, consequently pay for everything. In truth, if he could have done so without shame, he would have charged so much for the air, so much for coming to the province. Thus he kept a good house with other people's

money, became round as a cask, fat as a hog, and was called monsieur.

At the time of the last fair, three worthies who were apprentices in pettifoggery, in which profession there is more stuff to make thieves than saints, and who already knew to an inch how far they could go without putting their necks in the halter, resolved to amuse themselves and to live at ease, condemning some strolling tradesmen or other persons to supply all their wants. So these devil's pupils parted company with their attorneys with whom they were studying chicanery in the town of Angiers, and first of all took up their quarters in the inn of the *Trois-Barbeaulx*, where they would have the best rooms, turned everything topsy-turvy, played the fastidious, ordered lampreys at the market, held themselves out as merchants of the better class, who did not carry their wares with them and travelled with their bodies only. The host bustled about, turned the spits, drew the best wine, and made ready a genuine advocates' dinner for these three marplots, who had made a hundred crowns' worth of noise, and who, however hard pushed, would not have given up twelve *sols Tournois* which one of them jingled in his pocket. But, though they were destitute of money, they lacked not ingenuity, and the three had as perfect an understanding with regard to their rôles as thieves at a fair. It was a farce wherein was both food and drink, for they made such havoc during five days among provisions of all sorts, that a party of lansquenets would have spoiled less than

they stole. These three limbs of the law sallied forth to the fair after breakfast, well-primed, well-stuffed, with swollen paunches; and there they slashed freely at the greenhorns and others, robbing, seizing, gambling, losing; unhanging placards and signs and changing them, placing the toyman's over the goldsmith's door and the goldsmith's over the cordwainer's; throwing powder into the shops, setting dogs on each other, cutting the reins of hitched horses, letting cats loose in crowds; yelling "Stop thief!" or asking each passer:

"Are you not Monsieur d'Entrefesses, of Angiers?"

Then they pushed people about, cut holes in bags of grain, looked for their handkerchiefs in ladies' satchels, and raised their skirts, weeping, pretending to seek some lost jewel, and saying to them:

"Mesdames, 'tis in some hole!"

They led children astray, slapped the paunches of them who stared at the crows, irritating, tormenting, incommoding everyone. In good sooth, the devil would have seemed a good fellow in contrast to these damned schoolboys, who would have got themselves hanged, had it been necessary for them to act like honest men; but it would have been as reasonable to expect charity from two excited lawyers. They left the fair-grounds, not fatigued, but sated with mischief-making, then dined until Vespers, after which they renewed their deviltries by torchlight. After the peddlers, they turned their attention to the *filles de joie*, to whom, by resorting to ruses innumerable, they give no more than that which they

received from them, following Justinian's maxim: *Cuicum jus tribuere:* to each his own juice.* Then, mocking at the poor creatures after the game, would say to them:

"The right is ours, and the wrong yours."

Finally, at their supper, having no subjects to practise upon, they fell to upon one another, or, to divert themselves further, complained to the landlord of the flies, informing him that innkeepers elsewhere had them caught, so that people of quality might not be incommoded by them. But, about the fifth day, which is the critical day in fevers, the host having never seen, although he squinted very hard, the royal shape of a crown in the hands of one of his customers, and knowing that, if everything that glittered were gold, it would cost less, began to knit his brows and to show less alacrity in meeting the wants of these superior tradesmen. Nay, suspecting that he was doing an unprofitable business with them, he essayed to probe the abscess of their pouches, which seeing, the three clerks, with the assurance of a provost hanging his man, bade him serve them straightway a good supper, inasmuch as they proposed to depart at once. Their jovial bearing put mine host's anxiety to flight. And, thinking that knaves without money should be solemn of feature, he prepared a supper worthy of canons, desiring, indeed, to see them tipsy in order to cast them into prison without trouble if occasion should arise.

* *A chacun son jus.*—It need hardly be said that the French word *jus* differs materially in meaning from the Latin *jus*.

Not knowing how to make their escape from the room, where they were no more at ease than fish upon straw, the three cronies ate and drank ferociously, measuring the height of the windows, watching for the moment to decamp, but could see neither joint nor crack. Cursing everything and everybody, one wished to go and let down his breeches in the open air by reason of the colic; another to fetch a doctor for the third, who swooned as naturally as could be. The accursed landlord trotted from his ovens to the dining-hall, from the dining-hall to the ovens, kept his eye upon the knaves, advanced a step to save his reckoning, fell back two steps to avoid being drubbed by my lords, in case they should prove to be real lords, and acted like an honest and prudent host who loved gold pieces and hated blows. But, under cover of serving them assiduously, had always one ear in the room, one foot in the courtyard; then, too, constantly thought that they called him, came running in at the slightest burst of laughter, showed his face to them by way of reckoning, and said again and again:

"What's your pleasure, messieurs?"

A query in answer to which they would gladly have given him ten fingers' length of his spits in the windpipe, forasmuch as he seemed to know well what was their pleasure at that juncture, seeing that, for a score of crowns of full weight, they would have sold each the third part of his share of eternity. Be sure that they sat upon their chairs as upon gridirons,

that their feet itched smartly, and that their buttocks burned not a little. Already had the host placed the pears, preserves, and cheese under their noses, but they, sipping their wine, nibbling distraught, glanced at one another to see if one of them had not found in his bag some good pettifogger's trick; and they all began to divert themselves with very long faces. The most cunning of the three, who was from Bourgogne, smiled when he saw that Rabelais's quarter of an hour had arrived, and said:

"We must needs postpone for a week, messieurs, as if we were at the Palais."

And the other two, notwithstanding the danger, made haste to laugh.

"What do we owe?" asked he who had in his belt the twelve sols aforementioned: he jingled them as if he had thought to make them give birth to others by that frantic movement.

He was a Picard, with a devilish temper, a man to take offence at a trifle in order to be able to toss the landlord out of window without remorse. Wherefore he said these words with a cunning air, as if he had ten thousand doubloons of revenue under the sun.

"Six crowns, messeigneurs," replied the host, holding out his hand.

"I will not consent, viscount, to be entertained by you alone," said the third student, who was an Angevin, crafty as a woman in love.

"Nor will I!" said the Bourguignon.

"Messieurs, messieurs!" rejoined the Picard, "surely you jest. I am your servant!"

"*Sambreguoy!*" cried the Angevin, "you will not let us pay thrice over. Our host would not permit it."

"Very good," said the Bourguignon, "that one of us who shall tell the worst story shall pay the reckoning."

"Who shall be the judge?" queried the Picard, pocketing his twelve sols.

"*Pardieu!* our host. He should be a good judge, inasmuch as he's a man of excellent taste," said the Angevin. "Come, master cook, sit you there, let us drink, and prick up your ears. The audience is opened."

Thereupon, the host sat him down, not without pouring out for himself a generous bumper.

"Listen to me," said the Angevin, "I will begin.

"In our Duchy of Anjou, the country people are very faithful disciples of our holy Catholic religion, and not one would sacrifice his share in paradise for lack of performing a penance or killing a heretic. Faith! if a minister of the *liffre-loffres* passed that way, he would soon be underground, nor ever know whence death came upon him.—One night, then, a goodman of Jarzé, returning from saying his prayers and emptying the wine-jug at the Pomme-de-Pin, where he had left his understanding and his power of memory, fell into the outlet of his horse-pond, thinking it was his bed. A neighbor of his, whose name was Godenot, spying him already caught by the frost, for it was winter, said to him mockingly:

"'Holà! what are you waiting for there?'

"'For the thaw,' said the worthy toper, finding his movements impeded by the ice.

"Thereupon, Godenot, like a good Christian, released him from his plight and opened the door of his house for him, from respect for wine which is lord of that country. Then the goodman went and lay in the bed of his maid-servant, who was a young and comely wench. And the old handicraftsman, inflamed by wine, ploughed a hot furrow, thinking that he was with his wife and thanking her for the remnant of virginity which he found in her. Now, hearing her husband's voice, his wife began to shriek like a thousand, and by these ear-splitting yells the ploughman was advised that he was not in the path of salvation, whereat the poor fellow was more distressed than one can say.

"'Ah!' he said, 'God hath punished me for not going to Vespers in the church.'

"Then excused himself as best as he could by blaming the wine, which had confused the memory of his virility, and, returning to his own bed, told his good housewife that, not for his best cow would he have such a piece of villainy on his conscience.

"'That is nothing!' said the wife to her man; and the girl having told her that she had dreamed of her lover, her mistress boxed her ears smartly to teach her not to sleep so sound. But the dear man, in view of the enormity of the case, lay on his bed lamenting and weeping tears of wine from the fear of God.

"'My love,' said she, 'go to confession to-morrow and let us say no more about it.'

"The goodman trots off to the confessional and in all humility tells his story to the rector of the parish, who was a good old priest, fitted to be God's slipper on high.

"'A mistake does not count,' he said to his penitent, 'you must fast to-morrow, and I absolve you.'

"'Fast! With pleasure!' said the goodman. 'That does not prevent my drinking.'

"'Oh!' replied the curé, 'you will drink water, and eat nothing at all except a quarter of a loaf and an apple.'

"With that the goodman, who had no manner of confidence in his memory, returned home, muttering to himself the penance imposed upon him. But, having loyally begun with a quarter of a loaf and an apple, he reached home, saying:

"'A quarter of apples and a loaf.'

"Then, to cleanse his soul, he set about accomplishing his fast, and his good housewife having taken a loaf from the bread-chest and apples from the ceiling, he played very sadly with the sword of Cain. As he uttered a sigh on reaching the last slice of bread, not knowing where to put it, as he was full to the dimple in his neck, his wife urged that God desired not the death of a sinner, and that, for lack of putting a mouthful more of bread in his belly, it would not be charged against him that he had put his foot where the grass was too green.

"'Hush, wife!' said he. 'Even though I burst from fasting, I must fast!'

"I have paid my scot. Your turn, viscount!" said the Angevin, looking at the Picard with a roguish expression.

"The jugs are empty," said the host. "Holà there! wine!"

"Let us drink!" cried the Picard. "Liquid letters flow better."

Thereupon, he emptied his glass, nor left a drop of wine therein, and, after a pretty little preacher's cough, began:

"You must know that our Picard damsels, before beginning housekeeping, are accustomed to earn by virtuous means their clothes, plate, chests, in a word, all their household utensils. And, to this end, take service at Péronne, Abbeville, Amiens, and other towns, where they do menial work, wash glasses, wipe plates, carry dinners and all that they can carry. Then they are all married as soon as they know how to make something over and above what they bring to their husbands. They are the best housekeepers in the world, inasmuch as they are familiar with household service and can do everything very well. A maiden from Azonville, which is the country of which I am lord by inheritance, having heard of Paris, where people stooped not to pick up ten sous, and where one could subsist for a day simply by passing before the cookshops, and sniffing the air, so laden with richness was it, strove to find means to go thither, hoping to bring back the worth of a poor-box. She walked on and on, and arrived at last, armed with a basketful of

emptiness. She fell in, at Porte Saint-Denys, with a party of brave soldiers, stationed there for a short time on guard, forasmuch as they of the Religion were threatening to flock to their churches. The sergeant, at sight of this hooded harvest, cocks his hat on one side, shakes his plume, twists his moustache, raises his voice, assumes a fierce expression, puts his hand on his hip, and detains the Picard maiden as if to make sure that she is well and duly pierced, forasmuch as otherwise young women are forbidden to enter Paris. Then asks her, to play the wag, but with a serious mien, for what purpose she had come, thinking that she wished to take the keys of Paris by assault. To which the artless maiden made answer that she sought a good place where she could take service, and feared no evil provided that she could earn something.

"'Well said, my dear,' said the wag; 'I am a Picard, and I will have you take service here, where you will be treated as a queen would often like to be, and you will earn a goodly sum.'

"With that he led her to the guard-house, where he bade her sweep the floor, scour the pots, kindle the fire, and have an eye to everything, adding that she should have thirty *sols Parisis* for each man if it pleased her to serve them. Now, as the detachment was there for a month, she would earn full ten crowns; and at their departure would find newcomers who would make a good bargain with her, and at this honest trade she would carry back many a gold piece and present from Paris to her province.

The innocent girl made the room very clean and neat, scrubbed everything, and prepared the supper so deftly, humming and singing all the while, that on that day the wretched barracks seemed to the soldiers like the refectory of a convent of Bendictines. And so, being well content, they gave each a sol to their excellent chambermaid. Then, when she had eaten her fill, they laid her in their commandant's bed, who was in the city with his lady, and petted her most fittingly with a thousand endearments characteristic of philosophic soldiers, that is to say, those who love what is virtuous. Behold her well tucked up in bed. Now, to avoid disputes and quarrels, my *gaule-bontemps* drew lots for their turns; then stood in line, going in turn to the Picard, very ardent, never speaking a word, the brave soldiers, and each one taking the worth of at least twenty-six sols Tournois. Although it was a somewhat laborious task, to which she was not accustomed, the poor girl did her best, and thus did not close an eye during the night. In the morning, seeing that the troopers were sleeping soundly, she rose, happy to find that the skin was not rubbed off her body after it had endured so heavy a task, and, although slightly fatigued, made her escape across the fields with her thirty sols. On the road to Picardie, she met one of her friends, who, in imitation of her, proposed to make a trial of service in Paris and was on her way thither with eager longing; she stopped her and questioned her as to what she had found there.

"'Ah! Perrine, do not go; one must needs have loins made of iron, and even then would they soon be worn out!' was the reply.

"Your turn, fat paunch of Bourgogne," he continued, smiting his neighbor's natural swelling with a true sergeant's blow. "Spit out your story, or pay."

"By the queen of chitterlings!" replied the Bourguignon, "by my faith! by *le morbey!* by God! by the devil! I know naught but stories of the court of Bourgogne, which are current only in our coin."

"Oh! *Ventre-Dieu!* are we not in the land of Beauffremont?" cried the other, pointing to the empty jugs.

"I will tell you, then, of an adventure well known at Dijon, which happened at the time when I was commandant there, and hath in all likelihood been put in writing. There was an officer of the law named Franc-Taupin, who was an old bag of villainies, always grumbling, always fighting, with a frosty look for everyone, never consoling with a jest the wretches he led to the gallows, and, in a word, a man to find lice on a bald head and shortcomings in God. This said Taupin, rebuffed on all sides, took unto himself a wife, and, by an extraordinary chance, there fell to him one as sweet as the peel of an onion, who, observing her husband's uncertain humor, gave herself more pains to provide joy for him at home than another would have taken to plant a cuckold's horns on his head. But although she took pleasure in obeying him in all things, and, in order to

have peace, would have tried to void gold for him, had such been God's will, this evil-minded man constantly upbraided her, and was no more sparing of blows to his wife than a debtor of promises to the bailiff. This unseemly treatment continuing despite the poor woman's devotion and angelic labors, she was fain, not becoming wonted to it, to appeal to her kindred, who intervened in the matter. And when they had come, the husband declared to them: That his housekeeper was devoid of sense, that he received from her naught but vexation, and that she made life very hard for him to live; sometimes waked him in his first sleep; sometimes would not come to open the door, and left him in the rain or the cold; and that nothing was ever as it should be in the house. His clasps lacked buttons, his points lacked tags. The linen was moulding, the wine growing sour, the wood wet through, the bed always squeaked unseasonably. In a word, everything was out of joint. To this torrent of false words, the wife replied by exhibiting the clothes and everything, in a good state of repair. At that, the sergeant said that he was very ill-treated; never found his dinner ready, or, if it were, there was no meat in the broth, or the soup was cold; either wine or glasses were missing from the table; the meat was ungarnished, no sauce or parsley; the mustard was spoiled; he found hairs in the roast, or the linen smelt musty and took away his appetite; to make a long story short, she never gave him aught that was to his taste. The wife, in

utter amazement, contented herself with denying as earnestly as could be these strange grievances charged against her.

"'Aha!' he exclaimed, 'you say no, mistress drabble-gown? Very good, come and dine here yourselves to-day, and you will be witnesses to her behavior. And, if she can serve me once according to my wish, I will admit that I am wrong in all I have said, I will no more raise my hand against her, but will give her my halberd, my breeches, and will abandon the command here to her.'

"'Ah!' said she, gayly, 'then shall I be henceforth lady and mistress.'

"Thereupon, the husband, relying upon the natural imperfections of woman, desired that the dinner should be served under the arbor in his courtyard, proposing to raise a hue and cry after her if she should be slow in trotting from the table to the buttery. The excellent housewife put forth all her efforts to do her duty well. And the plates shone so like mirrors, the mustard was so fresh and well mixed, the dinner so well cooked, hot enough to scald the windpipe and appetizing as a peeled fruit, the glasses so sparkling, the wine so cool, and everything so white and glistening and attractive that her repast would have done credit to a bishop's handmaiden. But, just at the moment when she was licking her lips before her table, casting about the superfluous glance which good housewives love to bestow upon everything, her husband knocked at the gate. At that, a miserable fowl, which had

had the assurance to mount the trellis to intoxicate itself with grapes, deposited a goodly supply of ordure on the fairest portion of the cloth. The poor woman was nearly falling dead, so great was her despair, nor could she devise any other means of remedying the fowl's incontinence than by covering the incongruous mass with a plate in which she placed surplus fruit from her pocket, abandoning all thought of symmetry. Then, to the end that no one might perceive the thing, straightway brought the soup, bade everyone take his seat, and gayly invited them to regale themselves.

"Now, seeing this goodly array of tempting dishes, one and all cried out, save only the devil of a husband, who sat in silent gloom, knitted his brows, muttered, looked all about, seeking some trifle wherewith to crush his wife. Thereupon she ventured to say to him, happy to be able to torment him under the protection of her kindred:

"'Here's your dinner, hot, and well cooked, white linen, salt-cellars full, plates clean, wine cool, bread well baked. What more do you wish? What do you lack?'

"'Dung!' he exclaimed in a frenzy of rage.

"In a twinkling the housewife removed the plate and replied:

"'There it is, my dear!'

"Seeing which the sergeant was crushed, thinking that the devil had taken his wife's side. Thereupon, he was sternly rebuked by her kinsmen, who adjudged him in the wrong, called him a thousand

bad names, and hurled more jokes at him than a clerk writes words in a month. Since that day, the sergeant lives on very good terms with his wife, who, at the slightest suggestion of displeasure, frowns and says to him:

"'Will you have some dung?'"

"Which of us has told the worst?" cried the Angevin, bringing his hand down like an executioner on the landlord's shoulder.

"He did! he did!" cried the two others.

And with that they began to dispute like eminent Fathers in a council, sought to raise a ruction, to throw jugs at one another's heads, and, by favor of the chances of battle, to escape to the open country.

"I propose to make peace between you," said the host, seeing that, where there had formerly been three debtors, all well-disposed, no one now gave a thought to the account.

They paused in dismay.

"I propose to tell you a better one; thus you will give me ten sols for each paunch."

"Let us listen to our host!" said the Angevin.

"There was in our faubourg of Notre-Dame-la-Riche, wherein this inn is situated, a fair damsel, who, in addition to her natural advantages, had a goodly store of crowns. As soon, therefore, as she was old enough and strong enough to bear the burden of marriage, she had as many lovers as there be sols in the poor-box at Saint Gatien's on Easter Day. This damsel chose one of them, who, saving your presence, could do his work by day and night as

well as two monks. So they were soon agreed, and the marriage arranged. But the happiness of the first night did not approach without some slight apprehension on the part of the bride that was to be, for that, by reason of a defect in her subterranean passages, she was addicted to the expulsion of vapors, which came forth after the manner of a bomb.

"Now, fearing lest she might give rein to her unreasonable flatulence while she was thinking of something far different, on that first night, she finally avowed her plight to her mother and invoked her assistance. Thereupon, the good woman informed her that this tendency to accumulate wind was a family inheritance, and that she had been much annoyed thereby in her day. But that, later in life, God had done her the favor to tighten her crupper, and that, for seven years past, she had not evaporated save on one last occasion, when she had given her deceased husband a notable blast by way of adieu.

"'But,' she said to her daughter, 'I had a sure receipt which my dear mother left to me, for bringing these superfluous words to naught and exhaling them without noise. Now, if these breaths have no bad odor, the scandal is entirely avoided. To effect this, you must let the windy substance work downward and retain it at the opening; then push hard;—the air, having become thin, floats away like a faint suspicion. And in our family this is called strangling the wind.'

"The daughter, well pleased to know how to do it, thanked her mother, danced merrily, piling up her flatulences at the bottom of her tubes, like an organ-blower awaiting the first note of the mass. Then, having come to the nuptial chamber, she attempted to expel it all as she climbed into bed; but the capricious element was so well cooked that it would not come forth. The husband came; I leave you to imagine how they fought in the pretty battle wherein, with two things, you do a thousand if you can. In the middle of the night, the bride rose, on some false pretext, and soon returned; but as she climbed to her place, her posterior, having a fancy to sneeze, discharged such a volley that you would have believed, as I did, that the curtains had been torn.

"'Ah! I missed my aim,' said she.

"'Tudieu! my love,' I said to her, 'pray spare your powder. You could earn your living in the army with that artillery.'

"She was my wife."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the clerks.

And they laughed loud and long, holding their sides and praising the host.

"Didst thou ever hear a better story, viscount?"

"Ah! what a story!"

"That *is* a story!"

"A master story!"

"The king of stories!"

"Ha! ha! it beats all stories, and henceforth there are no stories save innkeepers' stories."

"On the faith of a good Christian! 'tis the best story I ever heard in my life."

"I can hear the volley."

"For my part, I would like to kiss the orchestra."

"Look you, master landlord," said the Angevin gravely, "we cannot leave this house without having seen the landlady; and, if we do not ask leave to kiss her instrument, it is from respect for so excellent a story-teller."

With that they all extolled the host, his story, and his wife's affair to such good purpose, that the old scullion, believing in this ingenuous laughter and stilted laudation, called his wife; but, as she came not, the clerks said, not without ulterior motive:

"Let us go and see her!"

With that they all left the room. The host took the candle and went first up the stairs to show the way and light them; but, seeing the street-door ajar, the rascals vanished, as lightly as ghosts, leaving the host at liberty to take for his pay another volley from his wife.

THE ENFORCED CONTINENCE OF FRANÇOIS THE FIRST

Everyone knows by what ill-fortune King François, first of the name, was taken like a foolish bird and led in chains to the city of Madrid, in Spain. There the Emperor Charles the Fifth kept him very narrowly confined, as a thing of great price, in one of his castles, the which did cause our deceased master, of undying memory, untold *ennui*, forasmuch as, loving the open air, his comfort, and the rest, he could no more be contented to live in a cage than a cat to arrange laces. And so he fell into such strange melancholy, that, his letters being read in the Council, Madame d'Angoulême, his mother, Madame Catherine, the Dauphiness, Cardinal Duprat, Monsieur de Montmorency, and they who had the realm of France in charge, all knowing the king's rakish tastes, were of opinion, after mature deliberation, that Queen Marguerite should be despatched, with whom he would of a surety find relief from his troubles, the good lady being dearly loved by him, of merry humor, and learned in all knowledge. But, she alleging that her soul's welfare was at stake, for that she could not without great peril be alone with the king in his prison, there was despatched to the

court of Rome an adroit secretary, Sieur de Fizes, with the mission to obtain from the pontiff a brief of special indulgences, containing absolution in due form for the trivial sins which, in view of their relationship, the said queen might commit to the end of curing the king's melancholy.

In those days, Adrian VII., the Batavian, still wore the tiara, who—a most excellent man, be it said—did not forget, despite the scholastic ties that bound him to the emperor, that the welfare of the oldest son of the Catholic Church was at stake, and had the gallantry to send express to Spain a legate with full powers to save, without too great affront to God, the queen's soul and the king's body. This most painfully urgent affair troubled the lords of the court exceedingly, and caused an itching between the feet of the ladies, who, through great devotion to the crown, would almost all have offered to go to Madrid, had it not been for black distrust of Charles the Fifth, who allowed the king to see none of his subjects nor even of his family. So there was need to negotiate concerning the departure of the Queen of Navarre. Then there was no talk save of this lamentable abstinence and the absence of amorous exercise so unpleasant to a prince who was accustomed to it. In a word, from complaint to lamentation, the women ended by thinking more of the king's breeches than of the king himself. The queen was the first to say that she longed for wings. To this, Monseigneur Odet de Châtillon made answer that she needed not them to be an

angel. One lady, 'twas Madame l'Amirale, was wroth with God for that she could not send by post that which our poor sire so lacked, forasmuch as each of them would lend it in turn.

"God hath done well to nail them on," said the dauphiness sweetly, "for our husbands would leave us most shamefully bereft in their absence."

So much was said, so much was thought, that the Queen of Marguerites was, on her departure, commissioned by these good Christians to kiss the captive for all the ladies in the kingdom; and, had it been possible for them to supply merriment like mustard, the queen would have had plenty to sell to the two Castiles.

While Madame Marguerite was crossing the mountains, despite the heavy snows, with frequent relays of mules, hastening to these consolations as to fire, the king was afflicted by the most intolerable heaviness of the loins that he was destined to know in his whole life. In this extreme reverberation of nature, he opened his heart to the Emperor Charles the Fifth, to the end that he might be in pity supplied with a specific, urging that it would be an everlasting shame for a king to allow another to die for lack of love-making. The Castilian showed himself a man of heart. Thinking that he might recover, through his Spanish women, his losses in the matter of the king's ransom, he discoursed periphrastically to the persons entrusted with the care of his prisoner, giving them leave secretly to gratify him herein. Accordingly, one Don Hijos de Lara

y Lopez Barra di Ponto, a poor captain, penniless despite his genealogy, and who had long been thinking of seeking his fortune at the court of France, thought that, by procuring for the said king a soft cataplasm of living flesh, he would open to himself a door honorably fertile in benefits, and, in truth, they who know both the court and the good king know if he was mistaken.

When the said captain came to take his turn in the chamber of the King of France, he asked him respectfully if it were his good pleasure to permit him a question as to which he was as curious as concerning papal indulgences. Whereat the prince, laying aside his hypochondriacal manner and twisting about in the chair in which he sat, made a sign of assent. The captain begged him not to be offended at the liberty of his language; then, avowing that he, the king, had the name of being one of the greatest rake-hells in France, he desired to know from his own lips whether the ladies of his court were very expert in love. The poor king, remembering his lusty bouts, heaved a sigh from the depths of his entrails, and said that no women in any country, the moon not excepted, knew better than the women of France the secrets of that alchemy, and that, at the memory of the delicious, charming, and vigorous endearments of a single one, he felt capable, if she were before him at that moment, of touzling her frantically on a rotten plank over a precipice a hundred feet high.

As he spoke, the good king, a libertine if ever

there was one, shot life and flame from his eyes so fiercely that the captain, albeit a brave fellow, felt secret quiverings in his entrails, so brightly blazed the consecrated majesty of the royal passion. But, recovering his courage, he assumed the defence of the Spanish ladies, boasting that in Castile only was love-making fittingly carried on, for that there was more religion there than in any other place in Christendom, and that the more the women feared damnation in giving themselves to a lover, the more ardently they flew to his arms, knowing that they must take pleasure in the thing for all eternity. Then he added, that, if the lord king chose to pledge one of the best and most fruitful seignorial estates in his kingdom of France, he would procure him a night of love after the Spanish fashion, wherein a fortuitous queen would draw his very soul out through his breeches if he looked not to himself.

"Done! done!" exclaimed the king, jumping from his chair. "By God! I will give thee the estate of Ville-aux-Dames, in my province of Touraine, with the most ample privileges of hunting, and of doing justice upon high and low."

Thereupon, the captain, who knew the Archbishop of Toledo's mistress, called upon her to encompass the King of France with caresses, and to show him the great superiority of Castilian imaginations to the simple movement of the French women. To which the Marchesa d'Amaesguy assented for the honor of Spain, and also for the pleasure of learning of what dough God made kings, seeing that she did

not know, having belonged hitherto only to princes of the Church. So she came, fierce as a lion that hath broken its bars, and made the king's bones, aye, his very marrow, crack, and all with such violence that another would have died of it. But the said lord king was so well equipped, so famished, so keen to bite that he did not feel when he was bitten, and the marchioness came forth shamefaced from this awful duel, believing that she had had the devil to confess.

The captain, relying upon his instrument, came to salute his lord, thinking to do homage to him for his fief. Thereupon, the king said to him, in a tone of raillery, that the Spanish women were of sufficiently high temperature, that they went vigorously about their work, but that they put too much frenzy where there was need of gentleness, and that he thought at every caress that it was a sneeze or a case of rape; in a word, that the commerce of Frenchwomen brought the drinker back thirstier than before, never wearying him, and that with the ladies of his court love was sweet beyond compare, and not the hard labor of a journeyman baker in his kneading-trough.

The poor captain was strangely taken aback by this language. Notwithstanding the faith of a nobleman whereby the king swore, he thought that the monarch wished to cozen him like a schoolboy stealing a slice of love in a Paris brothel. Nevertheless, not feeling sure, after all, that the marchioness had not over-Hispaniolized the king, he asked the

prisoner for his revenge, pledging him his word that he should surely have a veritable fairy, and that he would earn his fief. The king was too courteous and gallant a knight not to grant this request, and even added a pleasant royal word expressing his wish to lose the wager. After Vespers, therefore, the keeper ushered all warm, into the king's chamber, a lady most dazzlingly white, most bewitchingly sweet, with long hair, hands of velvety softness, swelling out her dress at the slightest movement, for her hips were gracefully rounded; having a laughing mouth and eyes moist in anticipation; a woman to make hell virtuous and whose first word had so stimulating a force that the king's breeches cracked.—On the morrow, when the lady had vanished after the king's breakfast, the worthy captain, joyous and triumphant, entered the room.

At sight of him, the prisoner cried:

"Baron de Ville-aux-Dames, may God give you such bliss! I love my prison! By Our Lady, I do not choose to pass judgment between the ways of loving of our countries, but I pay the wager."

"I knew 'twould be so!" said the captain.

"How so?"

"Sire, she is my wife."

Such was the origin of the family of Larray de la Ville-aux-Dames in our province, for the name of Lara y Lopez finally came, by corruption, to be called Larray. It was an excellent family, well affectioned to the kings of France, and hath multiplied greatly.

Ere long came the Queen of Navarre opportunely for the king, who, being wearied of the Spanish fashion, craved enjoyment *à la Française;* but what came after is not the subject of this Tale. I reserve for another place the story of how the legate proceeded to wipe out the sin of the thing, and the pretty saying of our Queen of Marguerites, who deserves a saint's niche in these Tales, forasmuch as it was she who first wrote the like and such charming ones. The morals of this Tale are easily understood.

It teaches, first, that kings should no more allow themselves to be taken in war than their archetype in the game of Palamades. But hence it follows that it was a very calamitous and awful blow to the people, this captivity of its king. Had it been a queen or even a princess, what worse fate could be? And so I opine that, even among cannibals, the thing would not happen. Is it ever right to imprison the flower of a kingdom? I believe that Astaroth, Lucifer, and the rest were too kindly in their devilries, that, in their reign, they would seek to hide away the joy of a whole people, the beneficent light whereat poor, suffering creatures warm themselves. And it must needs be that the worst of devils, *id est*, an evil-minded, heretical old woman, should chance to be on a throne, to hold sweet Mary of Scotland captive to the shame of all the loyal knights of Christendom, who should have come, all without assignation, to the foot of Fotheringay, leaving not one stone thereof upon another.

THE PLEASANT SAYINGS OF THE NUNS OF POISSY

The abbey of Poissy hath been celebrated by ancient authors as a place of merriment, where the wanton behavior of nuns had its beginning, and whence so many diverting stories proceeded, to entice laics to laughter at the expense of our blessed religion.

Thus the said abbey has furnished matter for proverbs which scholars no longer understand in our day, although they sift and chew them as best they can to digest them.

If you should ask one of them what be the *olives of Poissy*, he would reply, with grave face, that that is a periphrasis in the matter of truffles, and that the *way to prepare them*, of which people used to speak, making sport of those virtuous maidens, would seem to refer to a special sauce. That is how these scribblers happen upon the truth once out of a hundred times. To return to these worthy recluses, it was said, in jest, of course, that they liked better to find a wanton than a good woman in their chemises. Some other wags rebuked them for imitating the saints in their methods, and said that they revered Marie the Egyptian only because of her manner of

paying the boatmen. Hence the jest as to *honoring the saints à la mode de Poissy*. There is the *Poissy Crucifix*, too, which would keep the stomach warm. And then the *Poissy Matins*, which ended with choir-boys. Lastly, of a buxom hussy well versed in the dainties of love, it was said: *She is a nun of Poissy*. A certain thing which you know and which man can only lend was the *key to the abbey of Poissy*. As to the *door* of the said abbey, everyone knocked at it early in the morning. This door, gate, portal, opening, always ajar, is easier to open than to close, and costs much in repairs. In short, there was not, in those days, a pretty invention in love which did not come from the good convent of Poissy. Be sure that there be many falsehoods and hyperbolical statements in these proverbs, and mockeries, gossip, and idle talk. The nuns of Poissy were honest damsels, who, of a surety, cheated God in this way or that, to the profit of the devil, like so many others, forasmuch as we are naturally weak, and, nuns though they were, they had their faults. In them it was inevitable that there should be one spot where the stuff was lacking, and thence the evil. But the truth is that these evil sayings were the work of an abbess who had fourteen children, all living, for they had been fashioned at leisure. Now the fanciful amours and knaveries of this abbess, who was a maiden of royal blood, made the convent of Poissy fashionable. And thereafter no diverting adventure happened in the abbeys of France that had not its source in the itchings of these poor girls who would

have liked well to have a part in a tithe of them. Then the abbey was reformed, as everyone knows, and they deprived these holy nuns of the little pleasure and liberty they enjoyed. In an old cartulary of the abbey of Turpenay near Chinon, which, in these late evil times, had found shelter in the library at Azay, where the châtelain of to-day joyfully made it welcome, I found a fragment under the title of the *Hours of Poissy*, which was plainly composed by some merry abbé of Turpenay for the diversion of his neighbors of Ussé, Azay, Mongauger, Sacché, and other places in this province. I give it, under the authority of the frock, but arranging it to my own satisfaction, inasmuch as I have been obliged to translate it from Latin into French. I begin.

At Poissy, then, the nuns were accustomed, when mademoiselle the king's daughter, their abbess, had retired— She it was who gave the name of *faisant la petite oie* to the confining one's self in love to the preliminaries, prolegomena, introductions, prefaces, protocols, advertisements, notices, prologues, summaries, prospectuses, arguments, notes, epigraphs, titles, bastard titles, running titles, scholia, marginal comments, frontispieces, observations, gilt edges, pretty markers, clasps, roses, reglets, vignettes, tailpieces, and engravings, without once opening the book, to read, reread, study, apprehend and comprehend its contents. And she collected, in the form of a compendium, all the trivial extra-judicial delights of that charming language, which, though it comes

from the lips, makes no noise, and practised it so judiciously that she died a virgin to all seeming, and not unshapely. This joyous science was afterward deeply studied by the ladies of the court, who took lovers for the *petite oie*, others for honor, and sometimes also some who had over them the power of life and death, were masters of everything, a condition which many prefer.—I resume. When this virtuous princess was naked between her sheets, without shame, the said maidens, they who had a chin unwrinkled and a cheerful heart, would glide noiselessly from their cells and hide in that of one of their sisters who was much beloved by all. There they chatted gayly, interspersing their conversation with preserves, sweetmeats, drinking, young girls' disputes, teasing the older women, mimicking them like monkeys, making innocent sport of one another, telling tales till they wept with laughing, and playing at innumerable games. Sometimes they measured their feet, to see whose were the smallest; compared their plump white arms; examined to see whose noses had the infirmity of blushing after supper, counted their pimples, told one another where their birthmarks were, decided who had the clearest complexion, the prettiest coloring, the most shapely waist. Doubt not that, among these waists that belonged to God, there were slender ones, round ones, flats ones, hollow ones, convex ones, supple ones, thin ones, some of all sorts. Then they disputed as to which of them needed less material for her girdle, and she who required the fewest spans

was content without knowing why. Sometimes they told one another their dreams and what they had seen therein. Often one or two, sometimes all, had dreamed that they had tight hold of the keys to the abbey. Then they consulted one another concerning their petty troubles. One had pricked her finger, another had a whitlow; this one had risen with a thread of blood in the white of her eye; that one had dislocated her finger telling her beads. All had some little disturbance.

"Aha! you have lied to our mother; your nails have white spots on them," one would say to her neighbor.

"You remained a long time at confession this morning, sister," another would say; "you must have had some pretty sins to confess?"

Then, as there is nothing which so resembles one cat as another cat, they formed friendships, quarrelled, sulked at one another, disputed, were reconciled, envied one another, pinched one another for laughing, laughed for pinching, and played tricks on the novices.

Often they would say:

"If a gendarme should happen in upon us on a rainy day, where should we put him?"

"With Sister Ovide, hers is the largest cell; he could enter there with his plume."

"What does that mean?" cried Sister Ovide; "are not our cells all alike?"

Whereat my maidens would laugh like ripe figs.

One evening their little council was increased by

a pretty novice who was seventeen years old, seemed as innocent as a new-born babe, and could have had the sacrament without confession; she had water in her mouth because of these secret conversations, little drinking-bouts and merrymakings with which the young nuns sweetened the sacrosanct captivity of their bodies, and she wept for that she was not admitted thereto.

"Well," said Sister Ovide, "did you sleep well, my little fawn?"

"Oh! no," she replied, "I was bitten by fleas."

"Ah! have you fleas in your cell? We must rid you of them straightway. Do you know how the rules of our Order command us to expel them so that a sister may never see the tail of one during the whole of her conventual life?"

"No," replied the novice.

"In that case I will instruct you. Do you see fleas, do you see signs of fleas, do you smell the odor of fleas, is there any trace of fleas in my cell? Look and see."

"I find none," said the little novice, who was Mademoiselle de Fiennes, "and smell no other odor than our own!"

"Do what I am about to tell you, and you will be bitten no more. Instantly, upon feeling the prick, my child, you must undress, raise your chemise, and do no sin while looking at every part of your body. You must think of naught but the accursed flea, searching for it in good faith, without heed to the other things, thinking only of the flea

and of catching it, the which is a difficult task, forasmuch as you may be misled by little natural dark spots, with which your skin is marked by inheritance. Have you any such, my love?"

"Yes," she said, "I have two violet lentils, one on the shoulder, the other on the back, a little low; but it is hidden in the fold."

"How have you seen it?" queried Sister Perpetua.

"I know naught of it; 'twas Monsieur de Montrezor who discovered it."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the sisters, "and did he see naught but that?"

"He saw everything," was her reply; "I was very small; he was something more than nine, and we used to play together."

Thereupon, the nuns thinking that they had been in too great haste to laugh, Sister Ovide continued:

"To no purpose, then, doth the said flea leap from your legs to your eyes, try to hide in the hollow places, the forests, the ditches, go from valley to mountain, seek obstinately to escape you—the rule of the house ordains that you pursue him bravely, repeating *Aves*. Ordinarily, at the third *Ave*, the beast is caught—"

"The flea?" queried the novice.

"Always the flea!" rejoined Sister Ovide; "but, to avoid the perils of this hunt, you must take care, in whatever place you put your finger on the beast, that you seize naught else. Then, paying no heed to its cries, to its complaints, to its groans, to its

struggles, to its writhings, if perchance it rebels, as doth not infrequently happen, you press it under your thumb or any other finger of the hand in which you hold it; then, with the other hand, you seek a cloth to bind the flea's eyes and prevent it from jumping, for that the beast, no longer able to see, knows not where to go. However, as it might bite you even now, and would be quite capable of going mad with wrath, you gently open its mouth and delicately place therein a bit of the blessed boxwood which hangs by the little holy-water vessel by your pillow. Then is the flea compelled to be good. But remember that the discipline of our Order gives us the right of property in nothing whatsoever upon earth, and that this creature cannot belong to you. You must reflect that it is one of God's creatures, and try to render it more pleasing to Him. Before all else, therefore, it is necessary to ascertain three important facts, to wit: whether the flea is a male, whether it is a female, whether it is a virgin. Assume it to be a virgin, which very rarely happens, because these creatures have no morals, are exceedingly lascivious hussies, and give themselves to the first comer; you seize its hind legs, drawing them from under its little belly, you tie them together with one of your hairs, then carry it to the abbess, who decides on its fate after consulting the Chapter. If it be a male—"

"In what way can one tell that a flea is a virgin?" queried the inquisitive novice.

"In the first place," replied Sister Ovide, "it is

depressed and melancholy, laughs not like the others, bites not so hard, hath its mouth less open, and blushes when one touches it you know where—"

"In that case," rejoined the novice, "I have been bitten by males."

Whereat the sisters laughed so loud and long that one of them cracked a note in *A* sharp, and so sharp was the attack that she uttered a liquid harmony as well, which Sister Ovide pointed out to them on the floor, saying:

"See! there's no wind without rain."

The novice laughed herself, and thought that these outbursts of merriment were caused by the volley discharged by the sister.

"If, then," continued Sister Ovide, "it be a male flea, you take your scissors, or your lover's dagger, if, perchance, he hath given it to you in memory of him before your admission to the convent. In short, provided with some sharp instrument, you carefully open the flea's side. Expect to hear it yelp, cough, spit, ask your pardon; to see it twist, sweat, make eyes at you and do everything that it can invent to avoid this operation; but be not surprised. Summon all your courage, reflecting that you do this in order to bring back a perverted creature to the path of salvation. Then, you deftly take the entrails, the liver, the lungs, the heart, the gizzard, the noble parts, and dip the whole several times in the holy water, cleansing and purifying them, not without imploring the Holy Spirit to sanctify the interior of the beast. Lastly, you promptly replace all these

internal organs in the body of the flea, which is impatient to recover them. Being, by this means, baptized, the creature's soul becomes Catholic. You go straightway and fetch needle and thread and sew up the flea's belly with the greatest precautions, with due regard and attention, for these you owe to your brother in Jesus Christ. You will even pray for it, an attention of which you will see that it is sensible by the genuflexions and earnest glances it will bestow upon you. In a word, it will cease to cry, will no longer wish to bite you, and there be many which die of pleasure in being thus converted to our holy religion. You will follow the same course with respect to all those you may take, seeing which the others will take their departure, marvelling greatly at the converted one, so perverse are they, and so great their fear of becoming Christians in this wise."

"And they are very wrong, of a surety," said the novice. "Is there a greater joy than to be in the arms of religion?"

"Surely," said Sister Ursule, "here we are sheltered from the perils of the world and of love, wherein lurk so many perils."

"Are there any others than that of having a child unseasonably?" queried a young sister.

"Since the new reign," replied Sister Ursule, with a shake of the head, "love hath inherited leprosy, Saint Anthony's fire, the Ardennes disease, the Polish plait, and hath pounded up all the fevers, pains, drugs, and sufferings in its pretty mortar, to

compound therefrom a ghastly malady for which the devil hath given the receipt, luckily for the convents, forasmuch as they receive an endless number of terrified females, who turn virtuous from fear of this love."

Thereupon, they all pressed close to one another, alarmed by these words, but longing to know more.

"And is it enough to love to suffer?" said one sister.

"Oh! yes, my gentle Jesus!" cried Sister Ovide.

"Should you love a pretty gentleman but one paltry little time," continued Sister Ursule, "you would be likely to see your teeth drop out one by one, your hairs fall one by one, your cheeks turn blue, your eyebrows disappear with indescribable pain, and the leave-taking of your most charming possessions would cost you very dear. There are some poor women who have a crab on the end of the nose, others have beasts with a thousand claws which crawl about and gnaw our tenderest parts. Indeed, the Pope hath been obliged to excommunicate this kind of love."

"Ah! how fortunate am I to have had naught of all this!" cried the novice prettily.

Hearing this reminiscence of love, the sisters misdoubted that the said novice had been sharpened a little by the heat of some crucifix of Poissy, and had deceived Sister Ovide and mocked at her. They all rejoiced to have in her a *buona roba*, merry as a lark, as in truth she was, and asked her to what adventure they owed her company.

"Alas!" said she, "I allowed myself to be bitten by a great flea which had already been baptized."

At that confession, the sister in *A* sharp could not restrain a second sigh.

"Ah!" said Sister Ovide, "you are determined to give us the third. If you should talk that language in the choir, the abbess would put you on Sister Petronille's diet. So put a mute on your instrument."

"Is it true that you knew Sister Petronille in her lifetime, on whom God had bestowed the gift of going but twice a year to the Chamber of Accounts?" queried Sister Ursule.

"Yes," said Sister Ovide. "And it happened one night that she crouched there until Matins, saying: 'I am here, at God's service!' But at the first verse she was delivered, that she might not miss the service. Nevertheless, the late abbess would not agree that this was a special favor granted from on high, and said that God's vision did not extend so low. This is the fact: our deceased sister, whose canonization our Order doth to this hour pursue at the court of the Pope, and would have obtained had it the wherewithal to pay the proper costs of the Brief,—Petronille, I say, had the ambition to have her name written in the calendar, which would in nowise injure the Order. So she began to live in prayer, knelt in ecstasy before the altar of the Virgin which is on the side of the convent toward the fields, and claimed that she could plainly hear the angels flying in paradise, so that she was able

to note down the music they sang. Everyone knows that she obtained therefrom the sweet melody of the *Adoremus*, whereof no man could have invented a single measure. She remained whole days with her eye fixed like a star, fasting, putting no more nourishment in her body than my eye will hold. She had made a vow never to taste meat, neither cooked nor raw, and ate only a crust of bread each day; but on double-ended feast-days she added to her usual diet a little salt fish, with no suspicion of sauce. On this diet, she became wofully thin, yellow as saffron, dry as a bone in a graveyard, forasmuch as she was of an ardent temperament and whoever had had the good fortune to come in touch with her would have struck fire from her as from a stone. However, although she ate so little, she had been unable to avoid an infirmity to which we are all more or less subject for our evil or good fortune, since, were it not for that, we might be sadly embarrassed. Now this infirmity is the necessity of excreting after meals, filthily, like all animals, a substance more or less agreeable according to the person. Now, Sister Petronille differed from other people in that her waste was hard and dry; you would have said it was the excreta of an amorous doe, which are the most solidly cemented substances that any gizzards produce, as you know, if perchance you have found them under your feet in a forest path. Indeed, from their hardness, they are called *nouées** in hunting jargon. This of Sister

*From *noué*, knotted together. The corresponding English word is *fumet*.

Petronille's was not supernatural, therefore, seeing that fasting kept her temperament in a state of permanent fusion. According to the old sisters, her nature was so scorching, that, when they put her in the water, she gave forth a hissing noise like a hot coal. There were those who accused her of cooking eggs secretly, at night, between her toes, in order to endure her austerities. But evil schemes were devised to throw shame upon this great sanctity of which the other convents conceived jealousy. Our sister was guided in the path of salvation and divine perfection by the abbé of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris, a saintly man, who always ended his counsels with a last word, which said that we must offer to God all our pains and submit ourselves to His will, forasmuch as nothing happened without His express command. This doctrine, sage in appearance, hath given food for great controversies and hath been finally condemned by the judgment of the Cardinal de Châtillon, who maintained that in that case there would be no more sin, whereby the revenues of the church might be diminished. But Sister Petronille was imbued with this doctrine without realizing its danger. After the Lenten season and the fastings of the great jubilee, for the first time in eight months she had need to go to the golden chamber, and, in fact, went thither. And there, modestly raising her skirts, she put herself in a posture to do what we poor sinners do something more often. But Sister Petronille had no power to do more than expel the beginning of the thing, which held her

breathless, while the rest refused to come forth from the reservoir. Although she twisted her *bagonisier*, played with her eyebrows, and pressed all the springs of the machine, her guest preferred to tarry in that blessed body, simply putting its head out of the natural window, like a frog taking the air, and felt no calling to fall into the vale of misery among the others, alleging that 'twould not be in the odor of sanctity. And it had good sense, simple excrement that it was. The good saint, having employed all coercive measures, even to puffing beyond measure her buccinator muscles and straining the nerves of her thin face till they protruded, realized that no pain in the world was so intense, and, as her suffering neared the apogee of sphincterial terrors, 'O my God,' she exclaimed, straining anew, 'I offer it to Thee!'—At that appeal, the petrified substance broke short off at the mouth of the orifice and fell like a stone against the walls of the privy, with a *croc croc croooc paf!* You understand, sisters, that she needed no cleaning and drew the rest back an octave."

"Then did she see the angels?" queried a sister.

"Have they a behind?" said another.

"Why, no," Ursule replied. "Know you not that, on a certain day of assembling, God having ordered them to sit, they made answer that they had nothing to sit upon?"

With that they went to bed, some alone, others almost alone. They were good girls, who wronged nobody but themselves.

I will not leave them without relating an adventure which took place in their house, when the Reform passed its sponge over it and made them all saints, as hath been said above. In those days, then, there was, in the See of Paris, a veritable saint who did not trumpet his works abroad, and had no care for aught save the poor and suffering, to whom he gave lodgings in his good old bishop's heart, forgot himself for them who were in pain, went in quest of all wretchednesses in order to relieve them with words, with succor, with cares, with money, as need might be, appearing in the evil hour of the rich as well as of the poor, comforting their souls, reminding them of God, and running about in all directions to watch over his flock, the dear shepherd! So this worthy man went abroad heedless of his cassocks, cloaks, breeches, provided that the naked members of his church were covered. And he was charitable to the point of pawning himself to save even an evil-doer from suffering. His servants were compelled to think for him. Often he berated them when they changed his worn garments for new, without being bidden so to do, and he insisted on having them patched, even *in extremis*. Now, this good old archbishop knew that the late Sieur de Poissy left a daughter without a sou, after having eaten, drunk, even gambled away her inheritance. The said maiden lived in a hovel, without fire in winter, without cherries in spring, working at trivial tasks, not wishing to marry below her station or to sell her virtue. Pending the time when he should

fall in with a young husband whom he could present to her, it occurred to the prelate to send her the said husband's mould in the shape of his old breeches to be patched, a task which the poor maid would be much pleased to have in her destitution. One day, then, when the archbishop contemplated a visit to the convent of Poissy, to look after the welfare of the said reformed nuns, he gave to one of his servants his very oldest breeches, which loudly demanded renovation. "Take this, Saintot, to the young women of Poissy," he said. Note that he intended to say to Mademoiselle de Poissy. And, as he was thinking of the affairs of the cloister, he did not indicate to his servant the said Mademoiselle de Poissy's house, having discreetly concealed her desperate plight.

Saintot took the short-clothes and set out for Poissy, gay as a wagtail, stopping to chat with friends whom he met on the way, drinking in wine-shops, and showing many things to the archbishop's breeches, which might have learned much in that journey. At last, he reached the convent of Poissy and said to the abbess that his master had sent him to her to hand her this. Thereupon, the varlet departed, leaving with the reverend mother the garment accustomed to outline in relief the archi-episcopal proportions of the goodman's continent anatomy, according to the fashion of the time, and, furthermore, the image of those things whereof the Eternal Father hath deprived his angels, and which sinned not by magnitude in the prelate. Madame

l'Abbesse having advised the sisters of a precious message from the good archbishop, they came in haste, eager and curious as ants into whose republic falls a chestnut-bough. Then, at the unparcelling of the breeches, which yawned in shocking fashion, they cried aloud, covering their eyes with one hand, in mortal dread of seeing the devil come forth, the abbess having said: "This is the abode of mortal sin."

The mother of the novices, stealing a glance between her fingers, renewed the courage of the holy sheepfold, swearing by an *Ave* that no living creature was lodged in those breeches. Thereupon, they all blushed at their leisure as they gazed upon that *habitavit*, thinking that it was, perchance, the prelate's will that they should discover therein some wise admonition or evangelical parable. Now, albeit this sight made certain ravages in the hearts of these most virtuous maidens, they paid no heed to the quivering of their entrails, and, throwing a little holy water into the depths of the abyss, one touching it, another putting her finger through a hole, they all made bold to look at it. It hath been asserted even that the abbess, the first excitement vanished, was able to say in an unmoved voice:

"What is there at the bottom of this? With what purpose hath our father sent us that which consummates the ruin of women?"

"'Tis full fifteen years, mother, since I have had occasion to see the devil's pouch!"

"Hush, my daughter! you prevent me from thinking seriously of what it would be prudent to do!"

Thereupon, the archiepiscopal breeches were so twisted and turned, smelt, weighed, gazed at, and admired, pulled, hauled, turned inside out; there was so much deliberation, so much was said and thought, so much was dreamed by night and day, that on the morrow a little sister said, after chanting Matins, in which the convent omits one versicle and two responses:

"Sisters, I have found the archbishop's parable. He hath sent us, by way of mortification, his short-clothes to patch, as a blessed admonition to shun idleness, the mother abbess of all the vices."

Thereupon, it was a struggle who should first put hand to the archbishop's breeches; but the abbess exerted her supreme authority to reserve to herself the right of decision concerning this patching. And she worked with the sub-prioress during more than ten days, ripping the said breeches, stitching them with silk, making double hems, well-sewn, in all humility. Then, the Chapter having assembled, it was resolved that the convent should by a pretty souvenir testify to the said archbishop its great pleasure that he thought of his daughters in God.

Meanwhile, the prelate had so many fish to fry that he quite forgot his breeches. This is how it happened. He became acquainted with a gentleman of the court, who, having lost his wife, who was as vicious as the evil one, and barren, said to the good priest that he was most ambitious to fall in with a virtuous wife with whom there was a chance that he would not be a cuckold, but would have fine,

comely children, and he wished to have her from his hand, having trust in him. Now, the goodman had so great esteem for Mademoiselle de Poissy, that that fair maid soon became Madame de Genoilhac. The nuptials were celebrated in the palace of the Archbishop of Paris, where there was a great assemblage of persons of condition, and a table surrounded by ladies of high lineage, the flower of the court, among whom the bride seemed the fairest, forasmuch as it was known that she was a virgin, the archbishop being the guarantor of her purity.

When the fruits, preserves, and cakes, with multitudes of ornaments, were upon the cloth, Saintot said to the archbishop:

"Monseigneur, your well-beloved daughters of Poissy send you a noble dish for the centre."

"Put it in its place!" said the goodman, gazing in admiration at a lofty edifice of velvet and satin, embellished with gold wire and pendants after the fashion of an antique vase, from whose lid exhaled delicious odors.

The bride, straightway uncovering it, found sugar-plums, sweetmeats, cakes, and innumerable tempting dainties with which ladies love to regale themselves. Then one of them, some inquisitive saint, descrying a little silk flap and drawing it toward her, disclosed the habitation of the human compass, to the great confusion of the prelate, forasmuch as laughter burst forth like a volley of musketry from all the chairs.

"It was well to make of it the centre dish," said the bridegroom. "Those maidens are of sapient understanding. Therein be the sugar-plums of marriage."

Can there be any better moral than that expressed by Monsieur de Genoilhac? No; therefore no other is needed.

HOW THE CHÂTEAU OF AZAY WAS BUILT

Jehan, son of Simon Fourniez, called Simonnin, bourgeois of Tours, a native of the village of Moulinot, near Beaune, of which he assumed the name in imitation of divers tradesmen, when he obtained the post of silversmith to the late King Louis the Eleventh, fled one day to Languedoc with his wife, having fallen into great disgrace, and left his son Jacques in destitution in Touraine. This Jacques, who possessed nothing on earth besides his person, his cape, and his sword, but whom the old men, whose breeches had given up the ghost, would have deemed very rich, planted in his brain a firm purpose to save his father and make his fortune at the court, which came about that time to Touraine. Early in the morning this worthy Tourainer left his house, and, muffled in his cloak, save for his nose, which he kept in the wind, wandered through the town, with an empty stomach, hence not overburdened by his processes of digestion. He entered the churches, thought them beautiful, examined the chapels, wiped the pictures, counted the pillars like an idler who knows not what to do with his time and his money.

At other times pretended to recite *paternosters*, but made mute prayers to the ladies, offered them holy water on their going forth, followed them at a distance, and tried by these trivial services to fall in with some adventure wherein, at the peril of his life, he might obtain for himself a protector or a gracious mistress. In his girdle he had two doubloons, of which he was more careful than of his skin, seeing that it might be renewed, but the said doubloons in nowise. Each day he drew upon his store for the price of a crust and a few wretched apples, whereby he sustained life, then drank his fill of the water of the Loire. This judicious and prudent diet, beside being healthy for his doubloons, kept him as light and frisky as a greyhound, made his mind clear, and his heart warm, since the water of the Loire is of all elixirs the most heating, for, coming from afar, it hath heated itself coursing over the sands before reaching Tours. Doubt not, therefore, that the poor devil dreamed of a thousand and one happy accidents and fortunate adventures which lacked but a hair's-breadth of coming true. Ah! the good old days! One evening, Jacques de Beaune—which name he kept, albeit he was not lord of Beaune—walked along the quays, engaged in cursing his star and all else, forasmuch as the last doubloon was making preparations to leave him without the slightest respect; and lo! at the corner of a narrow street, he was near colliding with a veiled lady who gave him through the nostrils a delicious puff of pleasant female perfumes.

This pedestrian, bravely mounted on tiny pattens, wore a fine gown of Italian velvet, with ample satin-lined sleeves; and, as a specimen of her fortune, through her veil a white diamond of no mean size gleamed on her forehead in the rays of the setting sun, amid hair so daintily curled, terraced, plaited, and so neatly dressed withal, that her women must have spent three hours upon it. She walked like a lady who is accustomed to go abroad only in a litter. A page, well-armed, followed her. She was some damsel, enraptured of her person, belonging to some lord of high rank, or a lady of the court, for she raised her skirts a little and swayed her hips prettily like a woman of good breeding. Lady or strumpet, she pleased Jacques de Beaune, who feigned not discouragement, but formed the desperate plan of attaching himself to her and quitting her only when he should be dead. To this end, he contemplated following her, with the view of seeing whither she would lead him, to paradise or to the depths of hell, to the gallows or to some retreat of love; hope was born anew in the depths of his wretchedness.

The lady walked along the Loire, down stream, toward Plessis, and inhaled like the carp the cool, bracing air, idling, playing, like a mouse that would see everything and taste everything. When the said page saw that Jacques de Beaune persisted in following the lady in all her vagaries, stopped when she stopped and watched her trifling without concealment, as if he were within his rights, he turned

of a sudden and showed a surly, vixenish face, like that of a dog who says: "Back, messieurs!" But the good Tourainer had his reasons for acting. Thinking that, if a dog may unhindered watch a Pope pass, he, a baptized Christian, might watch a pretty puss, he went on, feigned to smile at the said page, and sauntered before or behind the lady. Remark that she said not a word, but looked at the sky, which was donning its nightcap, the stars and all the rest, for her diversion. So all went well. At last, opposite the Portillon, she stood still; then, to see better, threw the veil over her shoulder, and, so doing, darted a shrewd glance at her follower to judge if there were any danger of being robbed. Doubt not that Jacques de Beaune could do the work of three husbands, could lie beside a princess without causing her to blush, and had the gallant and resolute air which pleases the ladies; and, even though he was a little tanned by the sun because of going to and fro, his complexion would of a surety fade behind the curtains of a bed. The glance, slippery as an eel, which the lady bestowed upon him, seemed to him more animated than that she would have given to a mass-book. And so he based the hope of a windfall of love on that glance, and resolved to go on with the adventure even to the hem of the petticoat, risking, in order to go even farther, not his life, for he set little store by that, but his ears, and even something else beside. So the sire followed the lady to the city, who returned thither by Rue des Trois-Pucelles, and led the gallant, through

a tangled skein of narrow streets, even to the square where stands to-day the Hôtel de la Crouzille. There she stopped at the portico of a fine house, at which the page knocked. One of her servants opened and, the lady having entered, closed the door, leaving Sieur de Beaune open-mouthed, aghast and foolish, like Monseigneur Saint-Denis before it had occurred to him to pick up his head. He cocked up his nose to see if any drop of favor would fall upon him and saw no other thing than a light which ascended the stairs, moved through the apartments, and stopped at a large window where the lady was like to be. Believe that the poor lover remained there, all melancholy, musing profoundly, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, the window creaked and interrupted his fantasies. Believing that his lady was about to summon him, he raised his nose anew, and, save for the sill of the said window, which sheltered him after the fashion of an awning, he would have received an ample supply of cold water, and in addition the receptacle that contained it, since the handle alone remained in the hands of the person who had undertaken to bathe the lover. Jacques de Beaune, overjoyed thereby, did not lose the chance, and threw himself to the ground at the foot of the wall, crying: "I die!" in the feeblest of voices. Then stiffened himself among the fragments of broken pitcher and lay as if dead, awaiting the sequel. Behold the household in great commotion; the servants, in fear of the lady, to whom they confessed their fault, opened the doors

and lifted the sufferer, who was near laughing when he was thus carried up the stairs.

"He is cold," said the page.

"He hath lost much blood," said the maître d'hôtel, who, as he felt his pulse, had soiled his hand in the water.

"If he recovers, I will found a mass at Saint-Gatien!" cried the culprit, weeping.

"Madame resembles her late father, and if she fails to have thee hanged, the least reward for thy fault will be to be turned out of her house and her service," said another. "Yes, he is surely quite dead, he weighs too much."

"Ah! I am in the house of some very great lady," thought Jacques.

"Alas! doth he smell of death?" queried the gentleman who had caused the disaster.

Thereupon, as they carried the Tourainer, with much pains, up the spiral stair, his doublet caught on an ornament of the rail, and the dead man said:

"Ah! my doublet!"

"He groaned!" exclaimed the culprit, breathing hard with joy.

The servants of the regent, for 'twas the palace of the daughter of the late King Louis the Eleventh, of virtuous memory, the servants, I say, bore Jacques de Beaune to the great hall, and laid him stark and stiff on a table, not thinking that he would live.

"Go fetch a surgeon," said Madame de Beaujeu; "go here, go there."

And, in the saying of a *Pater*, all the servants hastened down the stairs. Then the good regent despatched her women for ointment, linen to bind wounds, Bonhomme water, and so many things that she was left alone. Then, gazing at the comely, unconscious youth, said aloud, admiring his noble bearing and his fine expression, though dead he was:

"Ah! God wishes to rebuke me. Because one poor little time in my life an evil impulse awoke in the depths of my nature and bedevilled me, my blessed patron is wroth and snatches from me the prettiest youth I have ever seen. *Pasques-Dieu!* by my father's soul, I will have all those hanged who have had a hand in his death!"

"Madame," said Jacques de Beaune, leaping from the board whereon he lay, to the regent's feet, "I live to serve you, and am so far from being injured, that, for this night, I promise you as many delights as there be months in the year, in imitation of Monsieur Hercules, a pagan lord. These three weeks," continued the crafty youth, misdoubting that at that juncture there was need to lie a little to bring things to a point, "I know not how many times I have fallen in with you, for whom I am mad with love, but dared not, through great respect for your person, take a step toward you; but doubt not that I am intoxicated with your regal beauty, since I have invented the ruse to which I owe the good-fortune of being at your feet."

Thereupon, he kissed them most amorously and

gazed at the good lady with an air to ruin everything. The said regent, by force of age, which hath not respect for queens, was, as everyone knows, in the second childhood of women. Now, in that painful and critical season, women formerly virtuous and without lovers seek greedily here and there to enjoy a night of love, unknown to all save God, to the end that they go not hence to the other world, with hands, heart, and everything empty, for lack of having knowledge of the special things you know. And so, my said Dame de Beaujeu, feigning no surprise when she heard this young man's promise, forasmuch as royal personages should be accustomed to have everything by dozens, kept those ambitious words in the bottom of her brain or of her register of love, which quivered in anticipation. Then she raised the young Tourainer, who found in his misery the courage to smile at his mistress, who had the majesty of an old rose, ears like dancing-pumps, and the complexion of a sick cat, but was so well tricked out, had so trim a figure, such a queenly foot, such a restless rump, that he might find, even in this ill-fortune, concealed machinery to assist him to fulfil the promise he had let fall.

"Who are you?" said the regent, assuming the unamiable air of the late king.

"I am your very loyal subject Jacques de Beaune, son of your silversmith, who hath fallen into disgrace despite his faithful services."

"Very good," replied the lady, "return to your table. I hear people coming, and 'tis not meet that

my servants should deem me your accomplice in this farce and mummery."

The worthy youth knew, by the soft tones of her voice, that the good lady most graciously pardoned him the enormity of his passion. So he stretched himself on the table and reflected that some noblemen had come to court with naught but old stirrup leathers to their feet; a thought which reconciled him perfectly to his good-fortune.

"'Tis well!" said the regent to her tire-women, "naught is needed. This gentleman is better. Let thanks be given to God and the Virgin Mary, that there will have been no murder done in my house."

So saying she passed her hand through the hair of the lover who had fallen to her from heaven; then, taking some Bonhomme water, she rubbed his temples with it, loosened his doublet, and under cover of looking to the patient's welfare, proved, better than a clerk entrusted with a special scrutiny, how soft and youthful was the skin of this little man who promised pleasure so boldly. The which all those present, men and women alike, were aghast to see the regent do. But humanity is never unbecoming to royal personages. Jacques rose, played the stranger, thanked the regent most humbly, and dismissed the physician, surgeon, and other black devils, saying that he had recovered from the fall; then gave his name, and would have made his escape, saluting Madame de Beaujeu as in awe of her, because of the disgrace in which his father was, but terrified, doubtless, by his shocking presumption.

"I cannot permit it," said she. "They who come to my house should not receive there what you have received.—Monsieur de Beaune will sup here," she said to her maître d'hôtel. "He who hath unduly assailed him will be at his discretion an he make himself known incontinent; else will I have him sought and hanged by the provost of the palace."

Hearing this, the page who had attended the lady in her promenade came forward.

"Madame," said Jacques, "let him be granted a pardon and a reward at my prayer, forasmuch as I owe to him the good fortune of seeing you, the privilege of supping in your company, and, perchance, that of procuring my father's rehabilitation in the office which it pleased your glorious father to entrust to him."

"Well said," replied the regent.—"D'Estouteville," she added, turning to the page, "I give thee a company of archers. But hereafter throw nothing from my windows."

Then the regent, fascinated by the said Beaune, gave him her hand, and he very gallantly led her to her chamber, where they conversed pleasantly, awaiting the appearance of the supper. Nor did Sieur Jacques fail to display his wit, to justify his father and seat himself firmly in the said regent's mind, who, as everyone knows, practised her father's trade, and did everything on impulse. Jacques de Beaune thought within himself that it would be difficult for him to lie with the regent;

such commerce is not carried on like the marriages of cats, who always have the gutters along the roofs of houses where they may go and fondle one another at their ease. So he rejoiced in the thought that he was known to the regent without having to count out to her that infernal dozen, since, for that, her tire-women and servants must needs be out of the way and her honor safe. Nevertheless, mistrusting the good lady's craft, he sometimes felt himself, saying inwardly: "Should I be able to do it?"—But, under cover of her discourse, the good regent likewise was thinking of this, who had arranged many a crookeder affair. And she began very prudently. She summoned one of her secretaries, a man fertile in the ideas suited to the perfect government of the kingdom, and bade him secretly deliver to her a fictitious message during supper. Then came the repast, which the good lady touched not, for her heart was swollen like a sponge and had diminished the size of the stomach; for she thought always of this comely and pleasing youth, having no appetite for aught but him. Jacques failed not to eat for reasons of all sorts. When the messenger arrived, Madame la Régente stormed, frowned after the manner of the late king, and said: "Shall we have no peace in this realm? *Pasques-Dieu!* we can have not one pleasant evening!"—And she rose and paced the floor.—"Ho there! my hackney! Where is Monsieur de Vieilleville, my esquire? No. He is in Picardie. D'Estouteville, you will join me with my household at the château of Amboise."—And,

spying Jacques, added: "You shall be my esquire, Sieur de Beaune? You wish to serve the king? A most excellent opportunity. *Pasques-Dieu!* come. There be malcontents to crush, and we have need of loyal servitors."

Then, in the time which an old pauper would take to say a hundred *Aves*, horses were bridled, girthed, and ready, madame on her hackney, and the Tourainer at her side, riding at full speed to the château of Amboise, followed by men-at-arms. To be brief, and to come to the point without comment, Sieur de Beaune was quartered a dozen rods from Madame de Beaujeu, far from prying eyes. The courtiers and all her people, marvelling greatly, held much discourse, wondering from which side the enemy would come; but the promiser of the dozen, taken at his word, well knew where the enemy was. The regent's virtue, well known throughout the kingdom, shielded her from suspicion, for she was deemed to be as impregnable as the castle of Péronne. At the hour of curfew, when everything was closed, ears and eyes, the château mute, Madame de Beaujeu dismissed her tire-woman and summoned her squire. The squire came. The lady and the adventurer found themselves under the mantel of a high fireplace, seated on a bench well stuffed with velvet; thereupon, the curious regent straightway asked Jacques in a caressing voice:

"Are you not hurt? I am very cruel to have forced a comely servitor, wounded but now by one of my people, to ride twelve miles. I was so

distressed that I could not retire without having seen you. Do you not suffer?"

"I suffer with impatience," rejoined the knight of the dozen, thinking that he must not balk at this juncture.—"Well do I see, my noble and beauteous mistress, that your servant hath found favor in your sight."

"La la!" said she, "said you not false when you told me—"

"What?"

"Why, that you have followed me a dozen times to the churches and other places to which I went in the flesh?"

"Of a surety," said he.

"In that case," said the regent, "I wonder that I had not seen until to-day a gallant youth whose courage is so plainly written in his every feature. I do not retract what you heard when I thought you injured. You please me, and I would fain be of service to you."

Thereupon, the hour of the diabolical sacrifice having struck, Jacques fell at the regent's knees, kissed her hands, feet, everything, so 'tis said. Then, while kissing and making his preparations, proved by many an argument to his sovereign's venerable virtue, that a lady bearing the burden of the State was justly entitled to divert herself a little. A license which the regent refused to admit, for she was resolved to be forced, in order to load the whole sin upon her lover. But this notwithstanding, doubt not that she had, beforehand, perfumed

herself, dressed for the night, and glowed with her lustful desires, whose high color lent to her cheeks a coat of natural rouge, which greatly enlivened her complexion. And, despite her feeble defence, she was, like a young lass, carried by assault in her royal bed, where the good lady and the man of the dozen were married in good conscience. There, from play to dispute, from dispute to quarrel, from quarrel to lechery, from thread to needle, the regent declared that she had more faith in the virginity of Queen Mary than in the promised dozen. Now, it happened that Jacques de Beaune did not find this great lady over-old, between the sheets, seeing that everything changes its aspect by the light of the night-lamps. Many women of fifty by daylight are but twenty at midnight, even as some are twenty at midday and a hundred after Vespers. Jacques, therefore, more overjoyed by this meeting than by meeting the king on a hanging day, held to his pledge. And madame, secretly amazed, promised for her part stout assistance, in addition to the lordship of Azay-le-Brûlé, well furnished with dependencies, wherewith she pledged herself to endow her cavalier, over and above his father's pardon, if from this duel she should come forth vanquished.

Thereupon, the honest youth observed:

"This is for saving my father from the law! This for the fief! This for the *lods et ventes!* This for the forest of Azay! *Item* for the right of fishery! Again for the islands in the Indre! Now for the meadow! With this we release from the hands of

justice our estate of La Carte, for which my father paid so dear! Here goes for an office at court!"

On reaching this figure, he deemed the dignity of his manhood involved, and reflected that, having France under him, the honor of the crown was at stake. In a word, by virtue of a vow made to his patron, Monsieur Saint Jacques, to erect a chapel to him on the said estate of Azay, he proffered his leal homage to the regent in eleven clear, well-defined, limpid, and resonant periphrases. As to the last epilogue of this discourse in a low place, the Tourainer had the presumption to propose to regale the regent handsomely therewith, reserving, for her awaking, an honest man's greeting, and such as befitted the lord of Azay offering thanks to his sovereign. The which was most sagely contrived. But when nature is foundered, it acts like a horse, lies down, would die under the lash before it would stir, and lies until it is pleased to rise with its magazines replenished. So it came to pass that when, in the morning, the falconer of the château of Azay essayed to salute the daughter of King Louis the Eleventh, he was fain, despite his boasting, to salute her as sovereigns salute, with charges of powder only. Wherefore the regent, on leaving her bed, and while she breakfasted with Jacques, who called himself the lawful lord of Azay, relied upon this shortcoming to contradict her squire, and declared that he had not won the wager, therefore not the lordship.

"*Ventre-Saint-Paterne!* I have been very near it!" said Jacques de Beaune. "But, my dear lady

and noble sovereign, it becomes neither you nor me to be the judge in our own cause. Being an allodial cause, it should be taken before your council, forasmuch as the fief of Azay is held of the crown."

"*Pasques-Dieu!*" rejoined the regent, laughing, which she rarely did, "I will give you Monsieur de Vieilleville's office in my household, I will not pursue your father, I will give you Azay, and I will install you in some post under the crown, if you can, without staining my honor, set forth the cause in council. But if a word should mar my renown as a chaste woman, I—"

"May I be hanged!" said the man of the dozen, turning the affair into a jest, for Madame de Beaujeu had a suspicion of anger on her face.

In truth, the daughter of King Louis the Eleventh was more solicitous for her royalty than for these dozens of antics, by which she set little store, forasmuch as, thinking to have her pleasant night without opening her purse, she preferred the laborious recital of the story to another dozen which the Tourainer in good faith proffered her.

"In that case, my dear lady," rejoined the jovial wight, "I shall, of a surety, be your squire."

Each of the captains, secretaries, and others holding charges in the regent's household, amazed at Madame de Beaujeu's abrupt departure, were advised of her sudden excitement, rode to the château of Amboise, in haste to know whence proceeded the commotion, and were in attendance to hold council at the regent's *levee*. She convoked them, in order

not to be suspected of having deceived them, and gave them divers fables to swallow, which swallow they did, and wisely. At the close of this sitting came the new squire to attend the said regent. Seeing that the council had risen, the bold Tourainer appealed to them to solve a question which was of moment to him and to the king's domain:

"Hear him," said the regent, "he says truly."

Thereupon, Jacques de Beaune, unawed by the pomp of this exalted tribunal, began thus, or nearly thus:

"Noble lords, I beseech you, although I am about to speak only of walnut-shells, to give attention in this cause and to pardon the trivial nature of the language. A nobleman walking with another nobleman in an orchard, espied a fine walnut-tree of God, well-planted, well-grown, good to look upon, good to keep, albeit a little hollow; a walnut-tree always green, with a sweet odor; a walnut-tree of which you would not weary, should you see it; a tree of love which seemed to be the tree of good and evil forbidden by the Lord God, and because of which were banished our mother Eve and her good husband. Now, messeigneurs, this said tree was the subject of a slight dispute between the two lords, one of those good-humored wagers which we love to make among friends. The younger boasted that he would throw twelve times through that thickly-leaved walnut-tree a stick which he then had in his hand as each of us sometimes hath in his when strolling in his orchard, and at each cast of said stick

would bring to earth a walnut.—Is not that the gist of the suit?" said Jacques, turning partly toward the regent.

"Yes, messieurs!" she replied, surprised by her squire's cunning.

"The other bet the contrary," continued the suitor. "And, lo! my noble hurler hurls the stick with address and courage, so deftly and so true, that both took pleasure therein. Then, by the jocund protection of the saints, who were diverted doubtless to see them, at each cast fell a walnut; and, in very truth, they had twelve. But, as luck would have it, the last of the nuts to fall was hollow and had within no nutritive pulp wherefrom another nut could spring, if a gardener should put it in the ground. Did the man with the stick win? I have said. Judge!"

"The case is clear," said Messire Adam Fumée, a Tourainer who at this time had the seals in his keeping. "The other hath but one way to extricate himself."

"What is that?" said the regent.

"By paying, madame."

"He is far too clever," she said, tapping her squire on the cheek; "he will be hanged some day."

She thought to jest. But these words were the true horoscope of the silversmith's son, who found Montfaucon's ladder at the end of the royal favor, through the vengeance of another old woman and the shameless treachery of a man of Ballan, his

secretary, whose fortune he had made, and whose name was Prévost, not René Gentil, as some have wrongly called him. This traitorous knave and wicked servant delivered, so 'tis said, to Madame d'Angoulême, the receipt for the money counted out to him by the said Jacques de Beaune, then Baron de Semblançay, lord of La Carte and Azay, and one of the greatest men in the State. Of his two sons, one was Archbishop of Tours; the other, general of the finances and governor of Touraine. But that is not the subject of the present tale.

Now, to return to this adventure of the good man's younger days, Madame de Beaujeu, to whom this pleasant experience—*beau jeu*—came something late in life, being well content to find notable wisdom and comprehension of public affairs in her fortuitous lover, gave him in charge the king's treasury, in which post he bore himself so well and multiplied so marvellously the royal *deniers*, that his great renown obtained for him one day the management of the revenues, whereof he was superintendent and judiciously directed their employment, not without rich profits for himself, which was just. The good regent paid the wager and allotted to her squire the lordship of Azay-le-Brûlé, of which the castle had long since been destroyed by the first bombardiers who came to Touraine, as everyone knows. And for this miracle of powder the said engineers, but for the king's intervention, would have been condemned as malefactors and heretics of the evil one by the ecclesiastical tribunal of the Chapter.

About this time was built, under the direction of Messire Bohier, general of the finances, the château of Chenonceaux, which, in sport and by caprice, was so built as to bestride the river Cher.

Now, the Baron de Semblançay, seeking to outdo the said Bohier, boasted that he would build his at the bottom of the Indre, where it stands to-day, like the jewel of that beauteous green valley, so solidly was it built on piles. Thirty thousand crowns did Jacques de Beaune expend thereon, in addition to the labor of his own retainers. Doubt not, therefore, that that castle is one of the noblest, prettiest, daintiest, most elaborately decorated castles in lovely Touraine, and hath its feet always in the Indre like a princely courtesan, gayly bedecked with its pavilions and delicately carved windows, with pretty soldiers on its weathercocks, veering with the wind as all soldiers do. But hanged was honest Semblançay before finishing it, nor hath anyone of his successors found himself sufficiently well supplied with *deniers* to finish it. And yet, his master King François, first of the name, had been his guest there, and the royal chamber may still be seen. At the king's *coucher*, Semblançay, who was called "father" by the said king, in honor of his white hairs, heard his master say, to whom he was much attached:

"There is twelve o'clock striking on your horoscope, my dear father!"

"Ah! sire," rejoined the superintendent of the revenues, "to twelve strokes of a hammer, now very old, but well delivered long ago at this very

hour, I owe my lordship, the money expended hereon, and the joy of serving you."

The good king desired to know what his servitor meant by these strange words. And so, while he bestowed himself in his bed, Jacques de Beaune told him the story which you know. The said François the First, who was much addicted to such drolleries, deemed the adventure most diverting, and was the more entertained thereby, in that at this time his mother, the Duchesse d'Angoulême, being near the turn of life, was persecuting the Connétable de Bourbon in some measure, to obtain from him some of these same dozens. Evil passion of an evil woman, for thereby was the kingdom endangered, the king made captive, and poor Semblançay put to death, as hath been said above.

I have been at some pains to set forth herein how the château of Azay was built, forasmuch as it is certain that in this wise the great fortune of Semblançay took its beginning, who did much for his native town, which he embellished; likewise expended notable sums in completing the towers of the cathedral. This pleasant adventure hath been told from father to son and from noble to noble in the said commune of Azay-le-Ridel, where the said tale still gambols behind the king's curtains, which have been curiously respected until this day. False as false can be, therefore, is the attributing of this Touraine dozen to a German knight, who, 'tis said, by this exploit, conquered the domains of Austria for the House of Hapsburg. The author of our day

who hath brought this fable to light, albeit very learned, has allowed himself to be hoodwinked by some chronicler, for the chancery of the Roman Empire makes no mention of this manner of acquisition. I am vexed with him for thinking that breeches nourished upon beer could have furnished for this experiment in alchemy aught equal to the breeches of Chinon make, so esteemed by Rabelais. Wherefore have I, for the honor of the province, the glory of Azay, the good fame of the castle, and the renown of the family of Beaune, whence the Sauves and Noirmoutiers are descended, republished the fact in its genuine, historic, wonderful fascination. If the ladies go to see the château, they will find some dozens still in the province, but only in instalments.

THE PRETENDED COURTESAN

What some people do not know is the truth touching the demise of the Duc d'Orléans, brother of King Charles the Sixth, the which was due to a goodly number of causes, one of which will be the subject of this tale. This prince was, of a surety, the greatest and most pitiless debauchee of all the royal race of Monseigneur Saint Louis, who was, in his lifetime, king of France, without excepting any one of those who have been the most dissolute of that worshipful family, which is so accordant with the vices and distinctive qualities of our gallant and wanton nation, that one could better imagine hell without Satan than France without its valorous, vainglorious, fighting rake-hells of kings. Wherefore do you laugh no less at the philosophical quibblers who tell you: "Our fathers were better," than at the honest old philanthropic bores, who claim that mankind is on the high-road to perfection. They are all blind men, who remark not the plumage of oysters and the shells of birds, who no more change than do our modes of life. Ho then! make merry while you're young, drink cold and weep not, since a quintal of melancholy would not pay for an ounce of sport.

The conduct of this prince, the lover of Queen Isabelle, who loved hard, led to many diverting adventures, forasmuch as he was a jovial blade, resembled Alcibiades in temperament, and was a true Frenchman of the good old stock. He it was who first conceived the idea of having relays of women, so that, when he travelled from Paris to Bordeaux, he always found, on dismounting, a good dinner and a bed well lined with dainty chemises. Fortunate prince! who died on horseback, as he always was, even between the sheets. Of his droll antics our most excellent King Louis the Eleventh hath set down one most admirable in the book of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, written under his eyes during his exile at the court of Bourgogne, where, during Vespers, to divert their thoughts, he and his cousin Charolois related to each other the pleasant adventures that came to pass in those days. Then, when true stories were lacking, their courtiers vied with one another in inventing others for them. But, from respect for the royal blood, Monseigneur le Dauphin hath ascribed the adventure that befell the lady of Cany to a bourgeois, under the title of the *Medaille à Revers*, which anyone may read in the collection whereof it is one of the most perfect gems, and is the first of the hundred. Now to my tale.

The Duc d'Orléans had among his retainers the lord of the province of Picardie, named Raoul d'Hocquetonville, who took to wife, to the future peril of the prince, a maiden allied to the House of Bourgogne,

rich in landed estates. But, in contrast to most heiresses, she was of such resplendent beauty that, when she was present, all the ladies of the court, even the queen and Madame Valentine, seemed to be in the shade. Nevertheless, in Madame d'Hocquetonville, her kinship to Bourgogne, her wealth, her beauty, and her sweet nature were of themselves as naught, for these rare advantages acquired a religious lustre from her supreme innocence, charming modesty, and virtuous education. So it was that the duke was not long on the scent of this flower fallen from heaven ere he was stricken with the love-fever. He fell into a state of melancholy, paid no heed to any sheepfold, and only with regret did he, from time to time, nibble at that tempting royal morsel, his German Isabelle; then flew into a rage and swore to enjoy by magic, by force, by trickery, or by her consent, that so charming a creature, who, by the sight of her sweet figure, constrained him to look to himself during his nights, now depressed and barren. At first, he pursued her hotly with honeyed words; but soon knew by her joyous manner that, in her own mind, she had determined to remain virtuous, seeing that she made answer to him, without feigning surprise at the thing, and without being angry, like women of easy virtue.

"My lord, I will tell you that I have no wish to burden myself with the love of another, not from scorn of the pleasures to be found therein, for they must be many and most poignant, forasmuch as so

great a number of women bury themselves therein, with their families, good name, future, and everything, but from love of the children entrusted to my care. I do not choose to blush for shame when I shall inculcate in my daughters this saving maxim: that in virtue consists our true felicity. In sooth, my lord, as our old days are more in number than our youthful days, so should we think more of them. From those who reared me I learned to esteem life at its real value, and know that everything therein is transitory, save only the safeguard of the natural affections. Therefore do I crave the esteem of all men, and, above all, of my husband, who is the whole world to me. So have I the desire to be virtuous in his eyes. I have said. And I pray you to leave me to attend to my household affairs in peace, else will I appeal, without shame, to my lord and master, who would retire from your service."

This hardy response inflaming the brother of the king yet more, he plotted to lay a snare for this noble woman, to the end that he might possess her, dead or alive, and doubted not of having her in his claws, relying upon his science in hunting that species of game, the merriest of all sports, wherein one must needs use the paraphernalia of other kinds of hunting, seeing that this pretty game is taken by mirrors, torches, darkness, light, the city, the country, copses, water-courses, nets, unhooded falcons, dogs, trumpet, fowling-piece, decoys, snares, sheets, with the bird-call, in its form, on the wing, with birdlime, with limed-twigs, with bait, in a word, by

all the devices invented since the banishment of Adam. Then kills itself in a thousand ways, but generally by being ridden down.

So the sly dog said not a word more of his desires, but caused a post in the queen's household to be given to Madame d'Hocquetonville. And, one day, when the said Isabelle went to Vincennes to see the sick king and left him master of the Hôtel Saint-Paul, he ordered the head-cook to furnish the most tempting royal supper, directing him to serve it in the queen's chambers. Then summoned his unruly fair by express command and by a page of the household. The Comtesse d'Hocquetonville, believing her presence to be desired by Madame Isabelle respecting the duties of her office, or that she was invited to some impromptu festivity, made haste to obey. Now, in accordance with the plans laid by the disloyal lover, no one could inform the noble lady of the princess's departure; and so she hastened to the fine hall which adjoined the room wherein the queen lay at the Hôtel Saint-Paul. There she saw the Duc d'Orléans alone. Then did she suspect some treacherous scheme, went quickly to the bedchamber, found no queen there, but heard a hearty, princely laugh.

"I am lost!" she exclaimed.

Then sought to fly.

But the stout woman-hunter had stationed loyal servitors, who, not knowing what was on foot, closed the palace, barricaded the doors, and in that royal abode, so large that it made a fourth of Paris,

Madame d'Hocquetonville was as if in a desert, without other aid than that of her patron saint and of God. With that, mistrusting everything, the poor lady shivered with horror and fell upon a chair, when the details of this ambuscade, so shrewdly devised, were revealed to her amid much hearty laughter, by her lover. But when the duke gave sign of approaching her, this woman rose, and said to him, arming herself first of all with her tongue, and casting a thousand maledictions in his face:

"You will work your will on me, but only when I am dead! Ah! my lord, force me not to a struggle which will be known, beyond all doubt. At this moment, I can retire, and Sieur d'Hocquetonville shall know naught of the evil hour which you have brought into my life forever. Duke, you watch the faces of women too closely to find time to study those of men, and you know not what manner of servitor you have. Sieur d'Hocquetonville would suffer to be cut to pieces for your sake, so closely is he bound to you in memory of your benefactions, and also because you are attractive to him. But as intensely as he loves, so intensely does he hate. And I believe him to be a man capable of hurling a club at your head, without fear, to wreak vengeance for a single cry which you might have caused me to utter. Do you seek my death and your own, wicked man? Be assured that my character as a virtuous woman permits me to keep secret neither my good nor my ill fortune. Now, will you not allow me to go hence?"

And the rake began to whistle. Hearing this whistling, the good woman went hastily to the queen's chamber and took from a place which she knew a sharp instrument. And when the duke entered, to seek the meaning of this flight—

"When you shall pass this crack," she cried, pointing to the floor, "I will kill myself!"

The duke, undismayed, took a chair, moved it to the very line, and began to negotiate by argument, hoping to excite this timid creature's imagination, and to bring her to the point of blindness, by stirring the brain, the heart, and the rest by pictures of the thing. He said to her, then, with the endearing ways to which princes are addicted, that, firstly, virtuous women paid very dear for their virtue, since, to the end that they might acquire the very uncertain things of the future, they lost the sweetest joys of the present, for that husbands were forced, by exalted conjugal policy, not to uncover for them the box containing the jewels of love, because the said jewels gleamed so brightly in the heart, caused such glowing bliss, such ardent desires, that a woman could no longer endure to remain in the cold regions of her household duties; that this abomination of marriage was a most criminal thing, in that a man ought at least, in acknowledgment of the virtuous life of a good woman and of her dearly-bought merits, to exert himself, to struggle, to exhaust himself in the effort to serve her well in all ways, in the billing and cooing, amorous toying, sipping and nibbling at the sugar-plums and dainty confections

of love; and that, if she would taste of the seraphic sweetness of these ecstatic joys hitherto unknown to her, she would look upon all the other things of life as worthless trash; if such were her will, he would be more dumb than the dead; thus would no scandal befoul her virtue. And with that the crafty libertine, seeing that the lady stopped not her ears, essayed to describe to her, after the manner of Arabian paintings which were then in great vogue, the lascivious inventions of the lecherous crew. Then did his eyes shoot flame, in his words were a thousand red-hot braziers, he modulated his voice and took pleasure himself in recalling the diverse methods of his mistresses, naming them to Madame d'Hocquetonville, and even describing to her the wanton antics, kittenish ways, and sweet embraces of Queen Isabelle, and made use of language so eloquent and so ardently inciting that he thought that he could see the lady slightly relax her grasp on the redoubtable sharp blade, and thereupon made a movement to approach her. But she, ashamed to be surprised in her musing, gazed proudly at the satanic Leviathan who tempted her, and said:

"Fair sir, I thank you. You make me love still more my noble husband, since by these things I learn that he esteems me much, having such respect for me that he dishonors not his bed by the depraved courses of *filles de joie* and women of evil life. I should deem myself disgraced forever, and should be contaminated for all eternity, were I to put my foot in the vile dens wherein those spurious jades

wallow. A man's wife and a man's mistress are not the same."

"None the less, will I wager," said the duke, smiling, "that you will henceforth urge Monsieur d'Hocquetonville something more warmly in the fray."

Whereat the good woman shuddered, and cried:

"You are a villain! Now I despise you and abominate you! What! not being able to sully my honor, you seek to sully my soul! Ah! my lord, you will carry a heavy burden from this moment.

"'Si je vous le pardoint,
Dieu ne l'oublierai point.'*

Was it not you who wrote those lines?"

"Madame," said the duke, turning pale with anger, "I can cause you to be bound—"

"Oh! no, I have made myself free!" she replied, waving her sharp blade.

The rake laughed afresh.

"Fear not," he said, "I shall find a way to plunge you into the mire wherein the spurious jades wallow, of whom you are so scornful."

"Never, while I live!"

"You shall plunge in," he continued, "with both feet, with both hands, with your two ivory breasts, with your other two snow-white things, with your teeth, with your hair, with everything.—You shall go of your own will, most lustfully and in such wise as to crush your rider like a frantic mare who breaks

* "Though I forgive you,
God will not forget."

her crupper, stamping, leaping, and snorting! I swear it by Saint Castud!"

And straightway he whistled to call a page. And when the page had come, bade him seek Sire d'Hocquetonville, Savoisy, Tanneguy, Cypierre, and other varlets of his band, and invite them hither to supper, not forgetting, when they were bidden, to recruit also several pretty chemises full of lovely and animated flesh.

Then he returned and seated himself in his chair, ten steps from the lady, whom he had not ceased to watch, while giving his orders to the page in a low tone.

"Raoul is jealous," he said. "I am bound, therefore, to give you wise counsel. In yonder closet," he continued, pointing to a secret door, "are the queen's finest essences and perfumes. In this other little den she prepares her baths and performs her obligations as a woman. I know, by many an experiment, that each of your pretty beaks has its own special perfume whereby it is recognized. Therefore, if Raoul be, as you say, murderously jealous, which is the worst of jealousies, you will use the perfumes of this wallower in the mire, since it is mire wherein she wallows."

"Prithee, my lord, what is your purpose?"

"You will know when it shall be necessary that you be informed. I wish you no ill and pledge you my word as a loyal knight that I will respect you most profoundly and will hold my peace for all eternity concerning my discomfiture. In fine, you

THE PRETENDED COURTESAN

"When you shall pass this crack," she cried, pointing to the floor, "I will kill myself!"

animated flesh.

Then he returned and seated himself in his chair, ten steps from the lady, whom he had not ceased

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shall find that the Duc d'Orléans hath a good heart, and avenges himself nobly for the contempt of the ladies by placing in their hands the keys of paradise. But, lend your ear to the careless, merry prattle that you will hear in the adjoining room, and, above all things, cough not, if you love your children!"

Inasmuch as there was no issue from that royal chamber, and the bars of the window left barely room to pass the head through, the rake closed the door, well assured that he held the lady fast, and enjoining her once again to remain silent.—Meanwhile, the revellers had come in great haste and found a toothsome supper laughing in silver-gilt dishes on the table, and the table itself well-laid, well-lighted, beautiful with its silver jars and jars full of royal wine. Then said their master:

"Fall on! fall on! to your seats, my good friends! I was within an ace of being bored. Then, thinking of you, I resolved, in your company, to have a taste of gay revelry after the ancient fashion, when the Greeks and Romans said their *paternosters* to Messire Priapus and to the horned god who is called Bacchus in all lands. And verily the feast shall be doubly hilarious, for when the cloth is removed then will there come pretty crows with three beaks, nor do I know, because I practise on them all so much, which is the best at pecking."

And one and all recognizing their master in all things, were much enlivened by this joyous harangue, save only Raoul d'Hocquetonville, who stepped forward to say to the prince:

"Fair sire, I will right heartily assist you in battle, but not in the battle of petticoats; on the tented field, but not on the field of flagons. My worthy comrades here are without wives at home, but not so I. For I have a sweet spouse to whom I owe my company and an account of all my acts and gestures."

"Am I, then, who also am in the married state, am I blameworthy?" said the duke.

"Oh! my dear master, you are a prince, you follow your method."

These noble words were, as you can well imagine, hot and cold to the heart of the captive lady.

"Ah! my Raoul," she murmured, "thou'rt a noble man!"

"Thou'rt a man whom I love," said the duke, "and whom I deem the most loyal and estimable of my servitors.—We others," he continued, glancing at the three lords, "are wicked fellows!—But, Raoul, be seated. When the linnets come, and linnets of good blood they be, thou shalt go to thy housewife. By God's death! I have used thee like a virtuous man, who knows naught of the joys of extra-conjugal love, and have heedfully provided for thee, in yonder chamber, the queen of Lesbias, a witch in whom all the devilry of the sex hath taken refuge. I wished, for once in thy life, since thou hast never had a great liking for the sauces of love and hast dreamed only of war, to give thee to know the hidden marvels of the gallant sport, for 'tis shame that a man who belongs to me should ill serve a pretty woman."

Upon this, D'Hocquetonville took his place at the table, to gratify the prince wherein it was lawful for him so to do. Then one and all fell to with loud laughter and merry jests, and with their words defiled the ladies. And, as their custom was, avowed their adventures, their pleasant encounters, sparing no woman, save only their own loved ones, betraying the special ways of each; thence followed many a ghastly confidence, increasing in disloyalty and obscenity as the wine in the jars decreased. The duke, merry as a residuary legatee, spurred on his companions, saying what was false in order to ascertain the truth; and they trotted to the dishes, galloped to the flagons, and poured forth their merry prattle. Now, as he listened to them, as his cheeks flushed, Sire d'Hocquetonville little by little divested himself of his virtuous scruples. Notwithstanding his virtues, he indulged in certain desires for the things of which they talked, and sank into those impurities as a saint becomes mired in his prayers.

Seeing which, the prince, watching for an occasion to gratify his wrath and his spleen, said to him, jestingly:

"Ah! by Saint Castud! Raoul, all our heads are in the same cap, we are all close-mouthed away from the table. Bah! we will say naught to madame! *Ventre-Dieu!* 'tis my wish to give thee to know the joys of heaven.—There," he said, pointing to the door of the room in which Madame d'Hocquetonville was, "there is a lady of the court and friend of the queen, but the greatest priestess of

Venus that ever was, whom no courtesans, harlots, strumpets, street-walkers, or spurious prudes can approach. She was conceived at a moment when paradise was joyful, when nature was in labor, when the plants consummated their nuptials, when the beasts neighed and mated, when everything was aflame with love. Although capable of taking an altar for her bed, she is too great a lady to let herself be seen, and too well known to utter other words than cries of love. But there is no need of light, for her eyes shoot flames; nor is there need of speech, for she speaks by movements and writhings more rapid than those of a deer surprised among the leaves. But, my good Raoul, with so spirited a mount, cling tight to the beast's mane, fight like a fearless rider, and do not leave the saddle, for with a single bound she would glue you to the rafters, an you had a bit of pitch on your backbone. She lives only on the feathers, is always afire, and longing for male society. Our poor deceased friend, the young Sire de Giac, died of exhaustion through her: she devoured his marrow in one springtime. *Vrai-Dieu!* to have a feast like that for which she rings the joy-bells and sets the fires alight, what man would not forego the third of his happiness to come? and he who hath known her would give for a second night all eternity, without a regret."

"But," said Raoul, "how are there such strong dissemblances in things naturally so uniform?"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

And with that all the boon-companions laughed

aloud. Then, enlivened by wine, at a wink from the master, all made haste to relate innumerable refinements of wantonness, crying out, waving their arms, and licking their lips. And, unaware that an innocent novice was within, these rake-hells, who had drowned their sense of shame in wine, told things to make the graven images on mantels, cornices, and wainscots blush. Then the duke surpassed them all, saying that the lady who lay in the chamber within, awaiting a gallant, must be the empress of these fantastic conceits, forasmuch as she added new and diabolically warm ones every night. Whereupon, the flagons being empty, the duke pushed Raoul, who allowed himself to be pushed with full knowledge, so bedevilled he was, into the chamber, where, by these means, the prince constrained the lady to decide by which dagger she would live or die. At midnight, Sire d'Hocquetonville came forth in high glee, yet not without remorse for having betrayed his good wife. Thereupon, the Duc d'Orléans dismissed Madame d'Hocquetonville through a gate in the gardens, that she might reach her home before her husband should arrive.

"This will cost us all dear," she said in the prince's ear as she passed the postern.

A year later, in Rue Vieille-du-Temple, Raoul d'Hocquetonville, who had quitted the duke's service for that of Jehan de Bourgogne, dealt the said prince, brother of the king, a blow on the head with a battle-axe, and killed him, as everyone knows. During that year had died Madame d'Hocquetonville,

who faded like a flower deprived of air or consumed by a worm. Her good husband caused to be engraved upon her tombstone, which is in a cloister at Péronne, the following inscription:

HERE LIES

BERTHE DE BOURGOGNE

THE NOBLE AND CHARMING WIFE

OF

RAOUL, SIRE DE HOCQUETONVILLE

ALAS! PRAY NOT FOR HER SOUL

SHE

BLOOMED ANEW IN HEAVEN

JANUARY THE ELEVENTH

OF THE YEAR OF OUR LORD, MCCCCVIII

AT THE AGE OF XXII YEARS

LEAVING TWO SONS AND HER HUSBAND IN SORE DISTRESS.

This inscription was written in fine Latin; but, for the convenience of all, I must needs English it, albeit the word *charming* doth feebly render *formosa*, which means *graceful of figure.* Monseigneur le Duc de Bourgogne, called *Sans Peur*, to whom Sire d'Hocquetonville, before his death, confided his sorrows, cemented in lime and sand upon his heart, was wont to say, despite his unfeeling coldness in

such matters, that this epitaph made him melancholy for a month, and that, among the abominable deeds of his cousin of Orléans, there was one for which he would himself kill him, were he not already dead; for that that wicked man had villainously mingled vice with the most sublime virtue in this world, and had prostituted two noble hearts, each by the other. And herein referred to Madame d'Hocquetonville and her virtue, whose portrait had been most wrongfully placed in the cabinet wherein his cousin kept the pictures of his strumpets.

This adventure was so immeasurably horrible, that, when it was told by the Comte de Charolais to the dauphin, afterward King Louis the Eleventh, he did not choose that his secretaries should give it to the world in his Collection, through regard for his great-uncle the Duc d'Orléans, and for Dunois, his old comrade, son of the duke. But the character of Madame d'Hocquetonville is so resplendent with virtues and beautiful with melancholy, that, for her sake, we may be forgiven for inserting this tale here, notwithstanding the diabolical contrivance and vengeance of Monseigneur d'Orléans. The merited demise of that debauchee caused, none the less, several great wars to which at last Louis the Eleventh, waxing impatient, put an end with blows of the axe.

This shows that in all things there is a woman, in France and elsewhere, and furthermore teaches us that sooner or later we must pay for our follies.

THE DANGER OF BEING TOO INNOCENT

Sieur de Moncontour, a worthy soldier of Touraine, who, in honor of the battle won by the Duc d'Anjou, our present most glorious lord and king, caused to be built at Vouvray the château of Moncontour, forasmuch as he bore himself most valiantly in that affair, wherein he overthrew the greatest of heretics, and therefore was empowered to take the name of the battle; the said great captain had two sons, good Catholics, of whom the elder was in high favor at court.

At the time of the pacification, arranged before the stratagem carried out on the day of Saint Bartholomew, the goodman returned to his manor, which was not then embellished as it is to-day. But there he received the sad news of the demise of his son, slain in a duel by Sieur de Villequier. The poor father was the more heart-broken in that he had arranged an excellent marriage for his said son with a daughter of the male branch of Amboise. Now, by this pitiably inopportune demise, vanished all the good-fortune and advantages of his family, whereof he hoped to make a great and noble race. With this end in view, he had placed his other son

in a monastery, under the guidance and government of a man renowned for his sanctity, who brought him up most Christianly according to the father's wish, who, in pursuance of his lofty ambition, aimed to make of him a cardinal by merit. To this end, the good abbé kept the young man closely confined, had him sleep beside him in his cell, allowed no evil weed to take root in his mind, educated him in purity of soul and true contrition, as all priests should be educated. So that the young priest, at nineteen years, knew no other love than the love of God, no other nature than that of the angels, who have not our carnal organs, that they may abide in perfect purity; for, were it otherwise, they would use them with vigor. The which the King on High mistrusted, and wished to have those pages always clean. And a happy thought it was, for, His little folk not being able to fuddle themselves in wine-shops and burrow in brothels like ours, He is divinely served; but remember, too, that He is Lord of all.

In his distress of mind, therefore, the lord of Moncontour deemed it well to take his second son from the cloister, to array him in the purple of the soldier and the courtier in the stead and place of the ecclesiastical purple. Then he conceived the idea of giving him in marriage to the maiden promised to the dead man, the which was shrewdly conceived, for that, all padded with continence and stuffed with everything good as the little monk was, the bride would be well served by him, and happier than she would have been with the elder, who was

already well stripped, ravaged, and undone by the ladies of the court. The unfrocked monk, being very lamblike in his ways, followed the sacred desires of his father and consented to the said marriage, with no knowledge of what a woman was, nor, which was a more serious matter, a maid. It so happened, his journey having been hindered by the quarrels and movements of the factions, that this innocent, more innocent than it is lawful for a man to be innocent, came not to the château of Moncontour until the eve of the nuptials, which were celebrated by virtue of a dispensation purchased at the archbishopric of Tours.

At this point, we must say what manner of maiden the bride was. Her mother, long a widow, occupied the house of Monsieur de Braguelongne, civil lieutenant of the châtelet of Paris, whose wife lived with Monsieur de Lignières, to the great scandal of that time. But in those days everyone had so many beams in his own eyes that no one was at liberty to see the motes in the eyes of others. In every family, therefore, people journeyed on the road to perdition, without surprise at their neighbors' conduct, some at an amble, others at a trot, many at a gallop, fewest of all at a foot-pace, for that road is very steep. At such moments, the devil plays his pranks with great ease in all directions, forasmuch as misconduct is fashionable. Poor old-fashioned Dame Virtue, shuddering, had taken refuge no one knew where, but tarried here and there in the company of chaste women.

In the very noble family of Amboise the dowager of Chaumont still lived, an old lady whose virtue had undergone many a trial, and in whom all the religion and decency of that noble family had taken refuge. The said dowager had taken under her wing, from the age of ten, the maiden with whom this tale has to do; nor was Madame d'Amboise in anywise disturbed thereby, being more free to go her own way, and, thereafter, came to see her daughter once in each year, when the court passed that way. Notwithstanding this marked abdication of maternity, Madame d'Amboise was bidden to her daughter's nuptials, likewise Sieur de Braguelongne, by the goodman, an old soldier who knew the world. But the dear dowager came not to Moncontour, for the reason that her deplorable sciatica forbade her so to do, likewise her catarrh and the state of her legs, which no longer gambolled. Whereat the good woman mourned greatly. Indeed, she shuddered to abandon to the perils of the court and of life this sweet virgin, pretty as a pretty girl can be; but she was fain to give her her flight. But not without promising her many a mass and prayer to be said for her welfare at Vespers each day. And the good lady was consoled in some measure by the thought that her rod would pass into the hands of a quasi-saint, trained to do right by the said abbé, who was known to her, which fact did much to assist the prompt exchange of vows. At last, kissing her, with tears in her eyes, the virtuous dowager gave her the last injunctions which women give to

brides: as that she must show due respect to madame her mother, and must obey her husband in all things.

At last, the maiden arrived, with great commotion, under the escort of tire-women, lady's-maids, squires, gentlemen, and retainers of the family of Chaumont, so that you would have thought her suite was that of a cardinal legate. Then came the husband and wife on the eve of their marriage. Then, when the festivities were done, were married in great state, on the Lord's Day, at a mass said at the château by the Bishop of Blois, who was a dear friend of Sieur de Moncontour. The feasting, dancing, and merry-making of all sorts continued until morning. But, before the stroke of midnight, the bridesmaids went to put the bride to bed, according to the custom of Touraine. And, meanwhile, the guests played a thousand tricks upon the poor, innocent husband to hinder his going to his no less innocent wife, and he readily yielded, through ignorance. However, the worthy Sieur de Moncontour stopped their jests and waggery, for it was meet that his son should give his mind to his duty. So the innocent went to his bride's chamber, who in his eyes was lovelier than the Virgin Marys in Italian, Flemish, and other paintings, at whose feet he had said his *paternosters*. But be sure that he was very far from becoming straightway a true husband, forasmuch as he knew nothing of the business, save that there was certain business to be done, whereof, by reason of his great shyness and embarrassment, he had not dared to

inquire the nature, even of his father, who said to him summarily:

"Thou knowest what thou hast to do, go to it valiantly."

Then he saw the comely girl who was given to him, lying under the bedclothes, curious beyond measure, with her head on one side; but she darted at him a glance as pricking as a lance-point, and said to herself:

"I must obey him."

And, knowing naught, she awaited the will of this slightly ecclesiastical gentleman, to whom, in very truth, she belonged. Which seeing, the Chevalier de Moncontour went to the bed, scratched his ear, and knelt, a thing wherein he was most expert.

"Have you said your prayers?" he asked very softly.

"No," she replied, "I forgot them. Will you say them?"

So did the husband and wife begin the things of marriage by imploring God, which was in nowise unseemly. But, as it happened, the devil heard, and he alone answered this prayer, God being then absorbed by the new and abominable Reformed religion.

"What have you been bidden to do?" said the husband.

"To love you," she replied in all ingenuousness.

"That was not enjoined upon me, but I do love you, and—to my shame I say it—better than I love God."

This speech did not over-alarm the bride.

"I would like much," said the husband, "to lie in your bed, without disturbing you too much."

"I will gladly make room for you, for I must be submissive to you."

"Then do not look at me. I will undress and come."

Upon these chaste words, the maiden turned to the wall, in great suspense, forasmuch as she was about to be separated from a man by the thickness of a shirt only, for the first time. Then came the innocent, glided into the bed, and thus were they, in fact, united, but very far from the thing you know. Have you ever seen a monkey, fresh from his home over-sea, to whom a nut is given for the first time? The monkey, knowing by vivid monkeyish imagination how delicious is the meat concealed beneath that shell, sniffs and twists and turns in true monkey fashion, saying I know not what between his cheeks. Ah! with what affection he studies it; how closely examines it; how tightly holds it, then taps it, rolls it on the ground, belabors it angrily, and often, if he be a monkey of base extraction and small intelligence, leaves the nut! So much, and more, the poor innocent, who, toward dawn, was constrained to confess to his dear wife, that, not knowing how to do his duty, nor what his duty was, nor whence his duty was deduced, he must needs make inquiries, in order to obtain aid and succor.

"Yes," said she, "since, unluckily, I cannot instruct you."

And so, in very truth, despite their inventions and essays of all sorts, despite a thousand things wherein innocents display their ingenuity and which the learned in love never suspect, the husband and wife fell asleep, in despair at having failed to reach the kernel of marriage. But they prudently agreed to say that they had enjoyed each other thoroughly. When the bride rose, still a maid, inasmuch as she had not been unmade,* she boasted loudly of her night, said that she had the king of husbands, and was as brisk in her prattle and repartee as those who know naught of such things. Indeed, everyone found the virgin a little too sharp, forasmuch as, to make sport of two at once, a certain Madame de la Roche-Corbon had incited a young maid of the family of La Bourdaisière, who knew naught of the thing, to ask the bride: "How many loaves did your husband take out of the oven?"—"Four and twenty," said she.

Now, as the husband wandered sadly about, which caused his wife great pain, who followed him with her eye, hoping to see an end of his innocence, the ladies thought that the joy of that night had cost him dear and that the bride repented bitterly that she had already ruined him. Then, at the wedding-breakfast, came the wicked jibes, which in those days were relished as of most excellent flavor. One said that the bride had an open air; another, that some good blows had been dealt last night in the château; this one, that the oven had burned out;

* Tousiours *damoiselle*, veu que elle n'avoyt point este *damée*.

that one, that the two families had lost something during the night that they would never find again. And a thousand other idle jests, sneers, and *équivoques*, which, unfortunately, the husband did not understand. But, in view of the great concourse of kindred, neighbors, and others, no one had gone to bed, but all had danced and made merry as the custom is at lordly nuptials.

Whereat the said Sieur de Braguelongne was well content, for Madame d'Amboise, inflamed by the thought of the good things which were happening to her daughter, cast at the lieutenant of the châtelet the glances of a merlin in the matters of amorous assignations. The poor civil lieutenant, who knew all about exempts and sergeants, for he it was who nabbed the pickpockets and bad characters of Paris, feigned not to detect his good-fortune, although his old lady invited him to it. But be sure that this great lady's love weighed heavily upon him. Wherefore he was true to her only through a sense of justice, forasmuch as it was not seemly for an officer of the law to change mistresses like a courtier, since he had in charge public morals, police, and religion. This notwithstanding, his rebellion must end. On the morning of the nuptials, a goodly number of guests took their leave. Thereupon, Madame d'Amboise, Monsieur de Braguelongne, and the kindred of the bride and groom were able to retire, the guests having departed. And as the supper-hour approached, the worthy lieutenant was destined to receive divers semi-verbal summonses,

to which it was not seemly, as in legal matters, to oppose any dilatory tactics.

During the supper, the said Madame d'Amboise performed more than a hundred antics to lure honest Braguelongne from the room in which he was with the bride. But in the stead and place of the lieutenant the bridegroom came forth. Now, in this innocent's mind had sprung up like a mushroom a certain expedient, to wit: to question this good lady whom he took for a model of virtue. Recalling, therefore, the religious precepts of his abbé, who bade him make inquiries in all matters of old people with experience of life, he resolved to confide his case to the said Madame d'Amboise. But, in the beginning, being abashed and shy, hummed and hawed, finding no words in which to describe his plight. And the lady likewise held her peace, because she was immeasurably irritated by the blindness, deafness, wilful paralysis of Sieur de Braguelongne. And she said to herself, as she walked beside that tempting morsel, the innocent groom of whom she had never thought, having no idea that that cat, so well supplied with young bacon, could be thinking of the old:

"That Hon Hon Hon!—with his beard like flies' feet, soft, gray, worthless, ragged old beard; beard without understanding, without shame, with no respect for woman; beard that pretends not to see or feel or hear; shaved, trampled, dishevelled beard; emasculated beard! May the Italian disease deliver me from that vile lecher with his withered

nose, burnished nose, frozen nose, nose without religion, nose as dry as the sounding-board of a lute, pale nose, soulless nose, nose that hath nothing but a shadow, nose that cannot see, nose shrivelled like vine-leaves, nose that I hate! old nose! nose stuffed with wind!—dead nose! Where could my sight have been when I attached myself to that truffle-like nose, to that old bolt that no longer knows its road! To the devil with my share in that honorless nose, that sapless old beard, that old gray head, that ape-like face, those old tatters, that old rag of a man, that old I know not what! And I would fain provide myself with a young husband who would marry me well—and much—and every day. And I—"

She was pursuing this wise thought when the innocent strove to repeat his anthem to this so intensely inflamed creature, who, at his first roundabout phrase, took fire in her understanding, like an old piece of tinder under a soldier's steel. Then, deeming it prudent to test her son-in-law, said to herself:

"Ah! young, sweet-smelling beard! Ah! pretty nose, all new and fresh! Fresh beard, innocent nose, virgin beard, joyous nose, beard of the springtime, sweet key of love!"

She talked the whole length of the garden, which was long. Then agreed with the innocent that, when night came, he should sally from his chamber and fly to her, where she boasted that she would teach him more than his father knew. Well content

was the husband, and thanked Madame d'Amboise, praying her to say no word of this bargain.

Meanwhile, good old Braguelongne had raved and muttered to himself:

"Old Ha Ha! old Hon Hon! may the pest carry thee off! may a cancer consume thee! toothless old curry-comb! old slipper that no longer holds the foot! old blunderbuss! old codfish! old spider that moves no more save to wind itself up at night! old corpse with open eyes! old devil's nurse! old lantern of the old crier of waifs! old hag whose glance kills! old *theriaki's* old moustache! old jade to make dead men weep! old organ pedal! old sheath for a hundred knives! old church porch worn smooth by people's knees! old trunk in which the whole world hath rummaged! I would give up all my happiness to come to be rid of thee!"

As he finished this refined soliloquy, the pretty bride, who was thinking of her husband's great chagrin because he knew not the workings of the thing so essential in marriage, and in nowise suspecting what was on foot, thought to save him some great embarrassment, shame, and severe labor by informing herself. Then looked forward to his surprise and joy, the coming night, when she should say to him, instructing him in his duty: "That's what you must do, my dear love."—And so, having been reared in profound respect of old men by her dear dowager, she resolved to accost this goodman prettily, in order to extract from him the sweet mystery of conjugal commerce. Now, Sieur de

Braguelongne, ashamed of having gone astray in the distressing thoughts aroused by his evening's task, and of saying nothing to so blithesome a companion, questioned the pretty bride bluntly as to her good-fortune in being provided with a young, very virtuous husband.

"Yes, very virtuous," she replied.

"Too virtuous—perhaps," said the lieutenant, smiling.

To make my story short, matters flowed so smoothly between them that Sieur de Braguelongne, singing a very different song, sparkling with joyous humor, pledged himself, being thereto requested, to spare no pains to clear away the mists from the understanding of Madame d'Amboise's daughter-in-law, who promised to come to take her lesson in his apartment. Doubt not that Madame d'Amboise played terrible music in a high key for the benefit of Monsieur de Braguelongne: How he had no gratitude for the good things she had procured for him: his condition, his wealth, her loyalty, *et cætera*. In truth, she spoke a full half-hour, without venting a fourth part of her ire. Wherefore a thousand knives were drawn between them, but they kept the sheaths.

Meanwhile, the husband and wife, safely in bed, were individually deliberating how to escape, in order to give the other pleasure. And the innocent said that he was very nervous, why he knew not, and would go and take the air. And the unwifed wife urged him to take a stroll by moonlight.

And the honest innocent compassionated his little one for having to remain alone a moment. In a word, both, at different times, slipped from the marriage-bed, in great haste, to seek knowledge, and went to their doctors, most impatient all, as you can believe. And they received a good lesson. How? I cannot say, for each one hath his own method and practice, and of all sciences, that is the most shifting in its principles. But be assured that never did scholars receive more animated instruction in any tongue, grammar, or branch of knowledge whatsoever. Then the husband and wife returned to their nest, very happy to communicate to each other the results of their scientific peregrinations.

"Ah! my dear," said the bride, "already thou knowest more about it than my master."

From these curious experiments came their joy in marriage and their perfect fidelity, forasmuch as, upon entering the married state, they discovered how superior were the qualifications of each for the joys of love, to those of all other persons, their masters included. And so, for the balance of their days, they confined themselves to the lawful enjoyment of their persons.

In his old age, the lord of Moncontour said to his friends:

"Do like me; be cuckolds in the blade and not in the sheaf."

Which is the true morality of conjugal paraphernalia.

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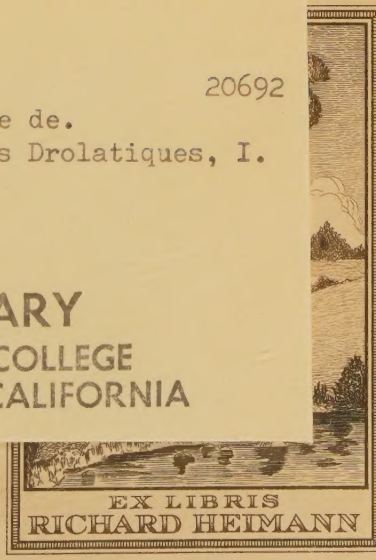
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